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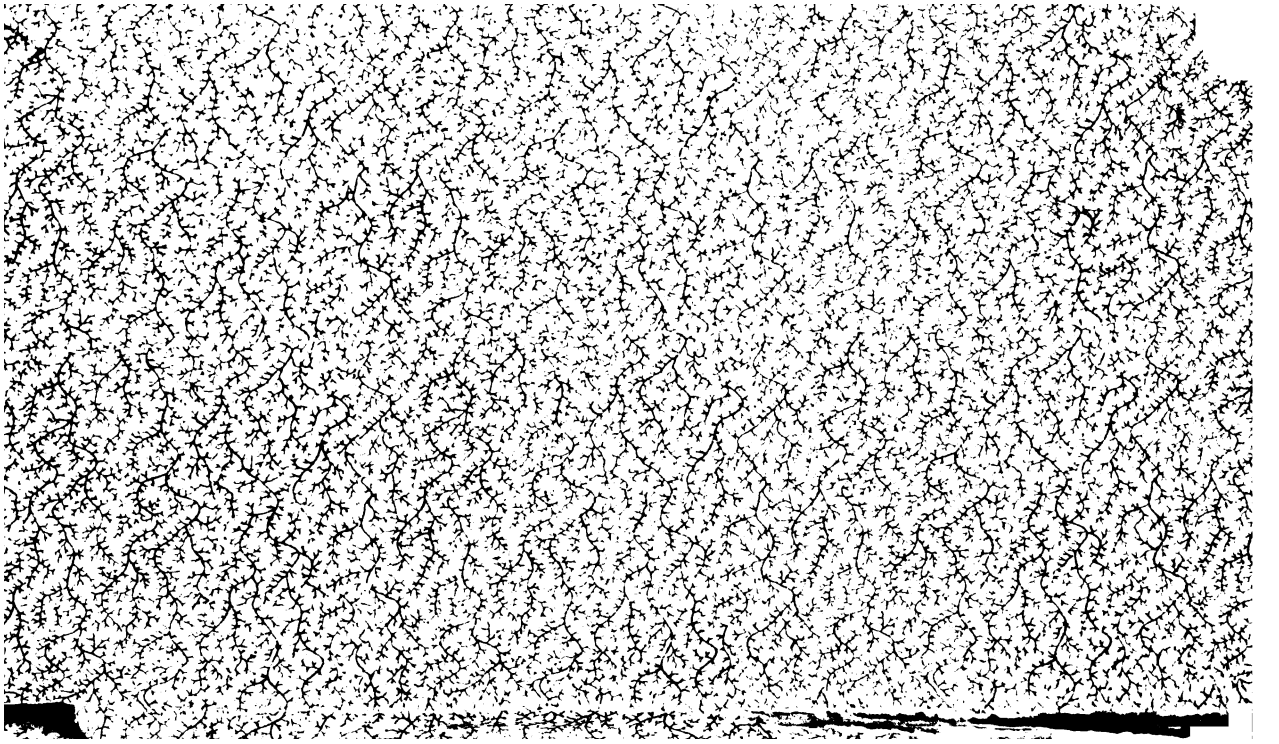


LETTERS

ON

LITERATURE,

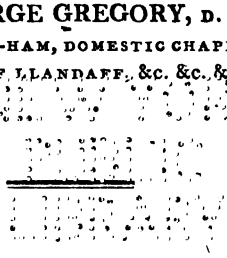
TASTE,

AND

COMPOSITION,

ADDRESSED TO HIS SON,

BY GEORGE GREGORY, D. D.
LATE VICAR OF WEST-HAM, DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF LLANDAFF, &c. &c. &c.



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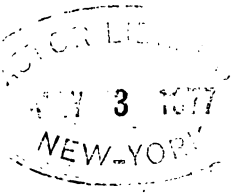
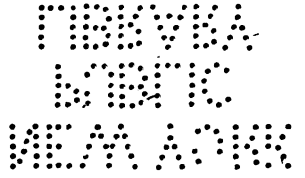


PREFACE.

THE following Work is presented to the public as the last literary composition which its well known Author lived to complete; and it contains the result of various observations, made by a vigorous and cultivated mind, upon different subjects of taste and literature. It was concluded a very short time previous to his decease; it assisted in cheering and engaging his mind, in soothing the languor of declining health, and in recalling the delightful remembrance of former associates, and of a long course of intellectual pursuits. To his friends these circumstances will render the Work additionally valuable. They will, from the natural and best feelings of the human heart, cherish the relic which reminds them of those hours of social conversation, when subjects of literature were discussed; when they were illuminated by his scientific and enlightened mind, or exhilarated by his innocent and undissembled cheerfulness. The public, we trust, will receive the work as the last performance of an author whom they have long approved, of one whose life was uniformly devoted to their, and his own, best interests: those of science, and literature; of religion, and virtue.



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LETTERS

ON

LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTION.....PRINCIPLE OF ASSOCIATION..... PLEASURES FROM THE FINE ARTS.

MY DEAR JOHN,

WE live in an age when almost every thing is artificial. When not only rules are proposed for the performance of almost every action connected with social life, but when the grounds and principles on which those rules are founded constitute an object of anxious inquiry. Men have long agreed in regarding some things as pleasing; but not satisfied with this, we are led to inquire whence they have derived their power to please, and on what principle in human nature it is that certain appearances, sounds or ideas are delightful to the human mind.

The pleasure which is imparted by the fine arts, and their power over the mind, are founded upon certain principles. We have not yet indeed been enabled to mount to the source whence their controul over the passions is derived; but by observing carefully certain effects, we can generally foretel when these effects will

be produced. Music is perhaps the simplest of all the fine arts: its power is derived entirely from the influence of certain sounds upon the organs of perception. It is impossible to say why some sounds or combinations of sound should be termed pathetic; why some should excite hilarity; why some should be adapted to the passion of love, and why others should be assimilated to joy and triumph; yet so it is, and there is scarcely an ear so insensible to harmony as not to have proved the force of music on one occasion or another. These effects upon the ear have been compared, and perhaps not without reason, to certain impressions produced upon our other senses.

> "That strain again;—it had a dying fall,
> O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing, and giving odour." *Shaks.*

To the eye some appearances, and even some colours, are productive of pleasure. It is extremely difficult to analyze the sensation, and to account for the pleasing effect of some flowers more than others; it depends upon the combination and arrangement of colours; upon the regular disposition of the petals; upon some unknown circumstance even independent of the principle of association, something as unconnected with ideas of social pleasure or pain, as the vibrations of an Æolian harp.

I find I have casually mentioned the word association, and it is necessary perhaps to enter upon a short explanation of it, since those pleasurable sensations, which may properly be called mental, and consequently those which are derived from the reading of poetry, or the beauties of composition in general, are not simple but complex sensations, derived, at least in part, from certain associations which the mind has formed with other objects.

It is exceedingly obvious that two or more sensations happening at the same time, the ideas will become united. Thus the ideas of the figure and colour of bo-

dies admitted by the eye are always combined, and these may be still associated with another idea admitted by means of the touch. Thus the idea, or picture formed in the mind of any object, is complex, or composed of several ideas united: of figure, colour, and perhaps softness or hardness also. If music is heard while we behold the instrument, the sound will be associated with the visible appearance, and the former will recal the idea of the latter, even when we do not see the instrument. Names are associated with things, and things with actions.

On this principle of association depends the necessary succession of ideas in a train, of which any one may satisfy himself by attending to the operations of his own mind: ideas are introduced by an agreement in some of the parts of which complex ideas are composed. Shakspeare, describing a merchant's fears, says,

"My wind, cooling my broth,
"Would blow me to an ague, when I thought
"What harm a wind too great might do at sea.
"I should not see the sandy hour-glass run,
"But I should think of shallows and of flats;
"And see my wealthy Arg'sie dock'd in sand.
"Should I go to church,
"And see the holy edifice of stone,
"And not bethink me strait of dangerous rocks?"

The association and train of ideas is perhaps still more pleasantly illustrated by a story related by Hobbes. "In a discourse on our present civil war (that in the reign of Charles I.) what," says he, "could seem more impertinent than to ask, as one did, the value of a Roman penny. Yet the coherence was to me sufficiently manifest. The thought of the war introduced the thought of the delivering up of the king to his enemies; the thought of that brought in the thought of the delivering up of Christ; and that again the thought of the thirty pence which was the price of that treason; and thence easily followed that malicious question, and all that in an instant of time; for thought is quick."

I hope sufficient has been said to make you acquainted with what is meant by the association and train of ideas; and what may appear a digression is in reality more connected with our subject than at first sight may appear. For much of the pleasure derived from the fine arts, and particularly from poetry and oratory, may be resolved, in part at least, into the principle of association. Many of the human passions are chiefly, if not entirely, derived from it. Thus patriotism, or the strong attachment which almost every person feels for his country, is in a manner created from the pleasurable sensations derived in our earliest youth from the enjoyments we have found there. The sight of the place where we have been happy always revives in us a placid, perhaps a melancholy idea of pleasure.

But it is not necessary in a course of letters on rhetoric and criticism, to enter deeply into the philosophy of the human mind, of which, after all, but little is known; and my wish is rather to make these letters practical than speculative. The pleasures afforded by the fine arts, music, painting, and poetry, have been termed "the pleasures of the imagination," in contradiction to the sensual pleasures, though I confess music appears to approach very near to a mere pleasure of the sense; and it is perhaps from its connexion with poetry, or rather from its subservience to it, that it has been classed among the superior arts, or those which administer pleasure to the mind.

The pleasures of the imagination are almost all in a considerable degree the result of association. If it was possible to present a finely pictured landscape to a person who had never seen a natural landscape, one who had been born blind, and who was recently couched for instance, I much doubt whether he would derive from it any other pleasure than that which its novelty would afford. I question whether the harmony of the colouring, so much spoken of by painters, or the light and shade, would afford any peculiar pleasure. It is the recollection that is revived of the beauties of nature, of the happiness we have enjoyed in similar scenes, or

possibly of that which we have heard described as flowing from them, and perhaps an admiration of the excellence of the imitation, that principally inspire us with pleasurable sensations on such an occasion.

Hence the fine arts, and particularly painting, sculpture, and poetry, have been termed the "imitative arts," because their chief excellence depends upon their being an imitation or description of whatever is beautiful or striking in nature.

To apply all this to the immediate object of our correspondence. Nothing is more obvious than that some books are more pleasing than others; some forcibly occupy our attention, while some inevitably tire and disgust. It is very easy to see why a narrative or description, a fine history or a well-told fiction, a tragedy or a romance should interest. It is because it affords us a picture of ourselves, or of something in which our passions are naturally engaged. But why one composition should be even more pleasing in its manner than another, why the style and language of an author should particularly interest us, is a more curious inquiry, and more remote from common observation.

Should we be able to satisfy ourselves upon this object, it is probable that even a practical benefit might result from it, since a person who is acquainted with the sources whence those materials are derived which render a composition pleasing, will be better able to avail himself of them than one who writes at random, and without any knowledge of his art.

I am not one of those who affect to "write dull receipts how poems should be made." I know that the most intense study will not give what is called genius, or imagination, or fancy; but still I must assert that every intellectual endowment may be improved. I must assert that writing, as far as chasteness, correctness, elegance, and fluency are concerned, is as much an art as any other; that it is in a great measure acquired by practice and study, by an imitation of the best models, and by occasionally referring even to principles and rules.

That this is an undoubted truth must be confessed by any person who observes how much more numerous good, or at least tolerable writers, are at present in this country than they were two centuries ago. Nature must create a Shakspeare, a Milton, a Pope, a Swift, an Addison, a Johnson or a Gibbon. These were men possessed of most powerful imaginations, most pregnant fancies; but it is chiefly art which produces the many smooth and elegant writers who flourish at all times in the inferior walks of literature. I knew a very old gentleman of considerable talent who used to say, that in his youth it was a distinction to write well; but that now even the essays in the common newspapers were composed in a correct and agreeable style.

What I have now observed ought not to lessen the value of this accomplishment of writing well in your opinion. The more general it is, the more indispensable it becomes. To be able to maintain an epistolary correspondence, with elegance and spirit, is now an essential qualification in the character of every gentleman, I had almost said of every lady. Besides, that all public speaking, in whatever line, is a species of composition, and he will certainly be the most successful who, if possessed of equal talents with his competitors, has made himself well acquainted with the rules and principles of eloquence.

LETTER II.

STYLE.

MY DEAR JOHN,

MY last letter concluded with recommending an inquiry why the style of one author should be more pleasing and interesting than that of another. If instruction was the sole end of reading, that style which conveyed knowledge in the simplest terms, with the greatest clearness and correctness, would be preferable to every other. This style has indeed its value, and even its beauty; and in books of mere science ought to be preferred to every other. I shall have in future to make some observations on this subject, when I treat more particularly of the different kinds of composition; but this is not our present object. We are now considering the source of that pleasure which is derivable from the mere style, manner, or language of a literary production.

Authors have distinguished between the different styles; and a grand division is into the plain, such as I have just now described, and the ornamented. I apprehend it is chiefly the ornamented that contributes to the mere pleasure of a reader. You cannot be at a loss to know what I mean by an ornamented style; it is that in which lively description, similies, allusions, metaphors, and the other figures of rhetoric abound.

Poetry always interests a reader of taste more than prose. The causes of this are the harmony arising from the metre or the rhyme, and which (without entering into a metaphysical inquiry as to the cause) may be referred to the same source as the pleasure which music affords. The other circumstance which renders poetry pleasing is the animated and figurative language, which is one of its characteristics.

We may, I think, easily explain why the style of one literary work is more pleasing than that of another, upon the very same principles that the matter of one is more interesting than that of another. I observed that histories of great events, tragedies, or ingenious fictions of human actions and events, always interest more than any other literary productions, and the reason is, that they contain something that immediately comes within the sphere of self, and engages, and by an associated action excites our passions.

It is of but little consequence whether the subject is fiction or reality. Robinson Crusoe, George Barnwell, and even Don Quixote, not to speak of the incomparable novel of Cecilia, interest, I will venture to say, more than Livy or than Hume. The same may be said of those plays of Shakspeare, which are notoriously founded on fiction, Hamlet, Othello, Cymbeline, Lear, The Merchant of Venice, &c. which are certainly not less interesting than his plays founded on the English history, though the latter are so far correspondent to fact, that many of the speeches are nearly a literal transcript from the antient chronicles.

It is the picture of the little world within that interests and agitates us; it is that correspondent emotions are at once excited in our minds by what we see or what we read, without referring to the judgment, or examining the proofs as to the reality of what is presented to us.

The very same principles I apprehend will apply to what is called an animated style, as to an animated or interesting narrative or description. That style will engage us most which calls up the most lively and vivid images, which upon the principle of association shall excite corresponding emotions in our minds.

I can cite a very decisive proof of what I have now asserted, in the well-known and incomparable parable of the prophet Nathan. The effect of this parable, I assert, is principally owing to the style or manner in which it is narrated; and to prove it, we need only re-

late the circumstance in the usual manner of a newspaper paragraph.

"We have it from the best authority, that Christopher Saveall, of the county of Salop, esq. the other day being surprized by the visit of a London friend and his family, and not being immediately supplied with butcher's meat, and not choosing to take any of his own flock, they being of a curious breed, dispatched two of his servants to the house of Timothy Boorman, a little farmer in the neighbourhood, who took forcibly thence, a pet lamb, which they immediately killed and dressed for entertainment of the great man's guests."

Here is nothing particularly affecting; and yet in England such a circumstance is more likely to excite interest and indignation, than in any of those countries where the feudal system is at all predominant. It must then be from the *style* or *manner* that this narrative has so powerful an effect over the heart, that a person of sensibility can scarcely read it without a tear. Let us examine.

"There were," says the prophet to the royal sinner, not yet a penitent, "two men in one city; the one rich and the other poor." Here the different state and circumstances of the two parties are admirably contrasted, and it affords a beautiful and striking opening to the narrative which is to follow. "The rich man," he proceeds, "had exceeding many flocks and herds." Here is a fine amplification, and yet so far from appearing forced it is absolutely necessary, and the contrast is still preserved in the succeeding sentence:...."But the poor man had *nothing* save one *little ewe* lamb"....where, observe, the words "nothing," "little," and even the word "ewe," which marks the sex, as more gentle and defenceless, are all emphatic, and increase the interest.... "which he had bought," bought it out of his little savings, it was indeed his all, "and nourished up, and it grew up with him, and with his children." What a train of endearing and affecting ideas are here summoned together? Not only the affections of the man, but of his children, are supposed to be attached to this cherished

object. "It did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom;"....here the very nature and kind of the animal is forgotten, and it becomes almost a rational creature; which is indeed nearly established in the conclusion of the sentence, for "it was unto him as a daughter."

Thus the hearer's mind is prepared by a series of pathetic imagery to feel in a tenfold degree the cruel sequel which is coming, and which is also not less skilfully wrought up. "And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

Nothing I apprehend need be added to convince you of the different effects to be produced by the manner of telling a very simple story, in other words, of the effect of style.

From this example too you will see the truth of an axiom, which is, I believe, generally admitted. That it is by a clear and distinct recapitulation of *little* circumstances, which render the picture more vivid and complete, that poets and orators, and all who address the passions of their hearers, establish an influence over their minds.

To select the circumstances which will have most effect is the peculiar province of genius; for there is nothing in which folly is more displayed than in too circumstantial a detail of trifling matters; while, on the contrary, it is certain that a discourse (and much more a poem) which consists entirely of abstract and general words, can never have an effect upon the hearer and reader.

I shall subjoin another instance of a picture composed of a variety of little, but well-chosen circumstances. An historian might have said, in allusion to the shocking murder of Prince Arthur, the real heir to the crown, in the reign of King John: "This event produced a general agitation in the minds of the people; scarcely any conversation occurred in which it was not directly

or indirectly alluded to, and thus the people were prepared for the occurrences which we have to relate." But our incomparable Shakspeare produces an assemblage of imagery, which while it entertains and engages, leaves a strong impression on the mind:

" Old men, and beldams, in the streets
" Do prophesy upon it dangerously:
" Young Arthur's death is common in their mouths;
" And when they talk of him they shake their heads,
" And whisper one another in the ear;
" And he, that speaks, doth gripe the hearer's wrist;
" Whilst he, that hears, makes fearful action
" With wrinkled brows, with nods, with rolling eyes.
" I saw a smith stand with his hammer thus,
" The whilst his iron did on his anvil cool,
" With open mouth swallowing a taylor's news;
" Who with his shears and measure in his hand,
" Standing on slippers (which his nimble haste
" Had falsely thrust upon contrary feet)
" Told of a many thousand warlike French,
" That were embatteled and rank'd in Kent;
" Another lean unwash'd artificer
" Cuts off his tale, and talks of Arthur's death."

Much of the satire conveyed in Hogarth's incomparable prints is found in the minute circumstances which he introduces. I need only mention the coronet, which is so carefully displayed on the crutches of the gouty peer in Marriage A-la-mode. I think therefore I may advance as an admitted truth, that a style is interesting and impressive in proportion to the variety of vivid images it presents, provided they are strictly connected with the subject, and calculated to excite corresponding emotions in the mind.

You must carry in your mind that I am now speaking of that style which pleases, and not of that which instructs. The work which engages our attention by its matter is extremely different from that which is extolled for its elegance of style. I will not pretend to assert that there is not a certain degree of beauty consistent with the utmost plainness and simplicity, but this is a beauty of a different kind; and productions which pos-

sess it will, as I stated, be only read for their matter. I am speaking at present of those sources whence the ornaments or decorations of style are derived.

One, who was himself a philosopher,* has very justly remarked, that "One reason why philosophers seldom succeed in poetry may be that abstract ideas are too familiar to their minds. They are perpetually employed in reducing particular to general propositions, a turn of thinking very unfavourable to poetry." And you will observe that all ornamented diction, every thing that is called eloquence, approaches more or less to the nature of poetry.

---

* Dr. Priestley.

LETTER III.

SOURCES OF FINE COMPOSITION.

MY DEAR JOHN,

METAPHYSICAL writers have generalized and classed the various sources whence the pleasures of the imagination, and the ornaments of style are derived. They are all to be traced into the human passions, for, as I observed, it is by exciting correspondent emotions in their minds that the imagery employed by any writer affects and interests his readers. The same philosophers have endeavoured to explain why the excitement of moderate emotions, such as are produced by the sight of a tragedy, should be a source of pleasure. The best cause I can assign for this is, that life itself consists chiefly in action, and it is only when in some degree occupied or engaged, that we feel the pleasure of living. Violent action or agitation, on the contrary, pains and fatigues. Hence the moderate excitement of the passions on the sight of a tragedy, or the hearing of a pathetic narrative, gives pleasure, whereas the same event in real life is productive of pain. Whether this account, however, is consistent with truth and nature or not, will make little difference as to the practical part of our subject. It is enough that pleasure is derivable from the following sources, and that what is captivating in writers may in general be traced to one or other of them: 1st, The marvellous; 2d, the new; 3d, the sublime; 4th, the pathetic; 5th, the ridiculous.

I. Our taste for the marvellous is chiefly to be referred to that general principle of our nature, which is so strong a principle of action, the passion of admiration. It may also be increased by the same cause from which I have accounted for the pleasurable sensations excited

by tragedy. Almost every thing wonderful is connected with something of the terrific, and we know that terror moderately excited, or I should perhaps say, rather excited by association than reality, is not less productive of pleasure than the pathetic. You must well remember the pleasure which you, but a very few years since, derived from the "Fairy Tales," the "Arabian Nights," the "Tales of the Genii," &c. and that in general the more you were terrified the greater was your enjoyment of the book.

You will always find pleasure from similar productions, but less as you advance in life. Your mind was more fervid, and less informed when you read them first than it will be at the period to which I refer. You will then be more shocked with their improbability, for the more this kind of imagery is believed in, the more vivid is the impression which it makes. Hence an obsolete system of mythology, such as that of the heathen poets, has less effect upon our minds than a modern well-wrought tale of witchcraft or apparitions, which are more connected with the faith that we profess; and even these had more effect, I dare believe, with our ancestors than with us.

The taste which all mankind naturally entertain for the marvellous is proved by the avidity with which any extraordinary story, even in the newspapers, is received, and the credit which is given to such. People are desirous of their proving true, and almost displeased to be undeceived.

A great part of the entertainment of our rural ancestors used to consist in hearing such wonderful stories related while assembled in a social circle round a warm hearth. The tales and ballads related or sung by the minstrels of old, were chiefly of this description:

> "Be mine to read the visions old,
> "Which thy awakening bards have told;
> "And lest thou meet my blasted view,
> "Hold each strange tale devoutly true."

The effect of the marvellous on the human mind is charmingly depicted by that incomparable judge of hu-

man nature, Shakspeare, in describing the manner in which Desdemona was induced to love Othello.

" Her father lov'd me; oft invited me;
" Still question'd me the story of my life,
" From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
" That I have pass'd:
" I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
" To the very moment that he bade me tell it.
" Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
" Of moving accidents, by flood, and field;
" Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach;
" Of being taken by the insolent foe,
" And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence,
" And 'portance in my travel's history,
" Wherein of antres vast, and desarts wild,
" Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
" It was my hint to speak, such was the process;
" And of the cannibals that each other eat,
" The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
" Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things to hear,
" Would Desdemona seriously incline:
" But still the house affairs would draw her thence;
" Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
" She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
" Devour up my discourse," &c.

II. The love of *novelty* is nearly allied to the principle we have been discussing, and it will be easily conceived to be a powerful instrument in the hands of a skilful writer or speaker, when we remember how strong and how general a passion curiosity is. The world itself has supplied a name to a very voluminous class of literary productions, the professed object of which is to gratify their readers with something *novel* or new. This passion seems indeed natural to creatures, who are in constant pursuit of happiness, and to whom possession brings only disappointment; and perhaps it may not be unphilosophically accounted for upon this principle. The pleasure we derive from novelty is something analogous to that which we derive from wit, and the more unexpected the greater our pleasure.

It was characteristic of the eloquence of Mr. Burke, that the novelty of his thoughts and allusions always struck and engaged his hearers. I have seen, in the midst of a grave debate, the whole house agitated as by a shock of electricity, by some new and unexpected sally. These were sometimes of a witty, and sometimes of a serious description. But in either way, I believe there never was an orator of whom novelty and originality of thought was so unequivocally the attribute.

If however novelty is so powerful an instrument in the hands of genius, there is nothing in which young and incompetent writers will so much expose themselves as in attempting it. Yet some authors of very secondary talents have acquired much temporary and transient fame, by an air of novelty. Among these, I cannot but rank the author of Tristram Shandy, the Sentimental Journey, &c. In these most unclassical productions, we see all regard to connexion and arrangement thrown aside; the reader is frequently left to help himself to a meaning, or, if there is one, it is such as no two men understand alike; sentiment is strangely mingled with attempts at wit, and both introduced with little apparent design.

I was proceeding to treat, in the third place, of the sublime, but I perceive that if I introduced it here I should greatly exceed my limits.

LETTER IV.

III.....THE SUBLIME.

MY DEAR JOHN,

WHEN you recollect that an author, who deservedly occupies the first place among critics, has written a whole treatise on the sublime, you will probably wonder at my boldness, when I presume to confine so important a subject within the short limits of a letter. But you will remember that these letters are intended only as an introduction to the more voluminous writers on criticism. Longinus too extends his notion of the sublime much further than I do, indeed almost to all that is excellent in serious composition.

Perhaps etymology is in general a better guide to truth than definition. The title which the invaluable treatise of Longinus bears is περὶ τοῦ ὑψους "of the lofty or high." To this you know the Latin word *sublimitas* perfectly corresponds, and our word sublime: though I think *the grand* would express it better in our language. Perhaps Horace has nearly defined it, in describing the character of a real poet.....

> "Ingenium cui sit, cui mens divinior, atque os
> "Magna sonaturum, des nominis hujus honorem."
> *Hor.* lib. i. sat. 4.

> "Is there a man whom real genius fires,
> "Whom the diviner soul of verse inspires;
> "Who talks true greatness.....Let him boldly claim
> "The sacred honours of a poet's name." *Francis.*

The sensation of the sublime is experienced when we survey a very large and lofty mountain, a vast extensive plain, a very wide and rapid river; and I believe it is

felt by every person when he first contemplates the expanded ocean.

The works of art can sometimes give us the sensation. I never find myself within the long and lofty aisle of a fine Gothic cathedral, without experiencing it; and I conceive it would be impossible to survey even one of the great pyramids of Egypt, without a similar feeling.

The convulsions of nature inspire ideas of the sublime. On feeling an earthquake, or surveying the eruption of a volcano, the sensation must be the sublime. with a mixture of terror. On viewing a thunder-storm at a distance, something of the same kind is experienced.

"Who but rather turns
"To heaven's broad fire his unconstrained view,
"Than to the glimmering of a waxen flame?
"Who that from alpine heights, his lab'ring eye
"Shoots round the wide horizon, to survey
"The Nile or Ganges roll his wasteful tide,
"Thro' mountains, plains, thro' empires black with shade,
"And continents of sand, will turn his gaze
"To mark the windings of a scanty rill
"That murmurs at his feet?" *Akenside.*

Even ideal contemplations will sometimes affect us in a similar manner. Such are the ideas of infinite space and eternity.

"In vain do we pursue that phantom time, too small, and yet too mighty for our grasp; when shrinking to a narrow point it 'scapes our hold, or mocks our scanty thought by swelling out to all eternity: an object unproportioned to our capacity, as is thy being, O thou antient cause! Older than time, yet young with fresh eternity!

"In vain we try to fathom the abyss of space, the seat of thy extensive being, of which no place is empty, no void which is not full." *Shaftsbury.*

The same sensation is excited in us by sentiments and passions. Striking instances of magnanimity, gene-

rosity, fortitude, courage and patriotism are sublime. Of these, perhaps, the finest instance that ever was pointed out is our Saviour's last prayer for his enemies ...." Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Sublimity may exist either in the sentiment, or the expression. When in the former, it is either displayed in the greatness and sublimity of the subject itself, or in the circumstances under which it is described. In the latter case, sublimity of expression, it will chiefly depend on the splendour and magnificence of the imagery by which the subject is illustrated.

In the first case, where the grandeur of the subject is the principal source of the sublime, a brevity of language, combined, if possible, with force and simplicity, is absolutely necessary, as in the famous instance quoted by almost every critic from Longinus to the present time: " And God said, let there be light.....and there was light." But the whole of that chapter is incomparably sublime.

Innumerable instances are to be found in Scripture of this species of the sublime, particularly in the Psalms and the books of the prophets, and especially in Isaiah and the book of Job. Such is that noble description of the Almighty Power in the 104th Psalm:

" Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters, who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh upon the wings of the wind."

I cannot believe the story which is related of Dryden, that he said he would rather be the author of the following translation by Sternhold and Hopkins, than of any poem in the English language.....

> On cherub and on seraphim
> Full *royally* he rode,
> And on the wings of mighty winds,
> Came flying *all abroad.*

If I am any judge of the false sublime, I find it in the two first of these lines, where a truly grand and magnificent idea is entirely degraded by the meanness of the imagery and expression.

In the 6th and 7th verses of the same Psalm, is a fine instance of the sublime, alluding, as I apprehend, to the deluge....

"Thou coveredst it (the earth) with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled, at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away."

Such also is the fine expression of Isaiah....

"And the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll."

And another in the Psalms....

"He looketh on the earth and it trembleth; he toucheth the hills and they smoke."

An instance of this branch of the sublime as applicable to human character, will be found in Horace....

"Et cuncta terrarum subacta,
"Præter atrocem animum Catonis."

Lucan has the same thought....

"Victrix causa Diis placuit, sed victa Catoni."

That species of the sublime, which arises principally from the adjuncts and circumstances, is so frequently mixed with that which is produced by the greatness and dignity of the subject, that it is difficult sometimes to separate them. In the following passage in the 139th Psalm, which I think the finest instance extant of the sublime, I scarcely know whether to attribute the effect to the dignity of the subject, or to the grandeur of the adjuncts and circumstances....

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
"And whither shall I flee from thy presence?
"If I ascend the heavens, thou art there;
"If I make my bed in the abyss, behold thou art there!
"If I take the wings of the morning,
"And dwell in the extreme parts of the ocean;
"There also thy hand shall lead me,
"And thy right hand shall hold me."

The strong expressions of the two last lines have commonly escaped the notice of critics.....But how for-

cibly do they impress us with the idea of the omnipresence of God? Wherever we are, we are in his actual custody and keeping, in his *hand:* "There also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall keep me."

Bishop Lowth, in his admirable lectures on the poetry of the Hebrews, points out the following as an instance of the true sublime, and I think it may class with the preceding....

"Tell in high, harmonious strains,
"Tell the world Jehovah reigns!
"He who framed this beauteous whole;
"He who fix'd each planet's place;
"Who bade unnumbered orbs to roll,
"In destin'd course through endless space.
"Let the glorious heavens rejoice,
"The hills exult with grateful voice;
"Let ocean tell the echoing shore,
"And the hoarse waves with humble voice adore!
"Let the verdant plains be glad!
"The trees in blooming fragrance clad!
"Smile with joy, ye desert lands,
"And rushing torrents, clap your hands!
"Let the whole earth with triumph ring!
"Let all that live with loud applause,
"Jehovah's matchless praises sing.
"He comes! he comes! Heaven's righteous King,
"To judge the world by truth's eternal laws."

You will easily perceive that this is only a paraphrase, or rather a translation from the Psalms.

There is no author who will furnish you with finer examples of this branch of the sublime than Virgil. The description of the Storm in the first book; the allegorical description of Fame, or rather of Rumour; the Sack of Troy in the second book; and almost the whole of the Descent to the Infernal Regions in the sixth, are pregnant with fine examples of the sublime in description. Of the sublime in expression, the following lines afford, in a short compass, a very fine instance, and yet with very little pomp of imagery. They are from the prophecy of Anchises of the future glories of Rome.

" Excudent alii spirantia mollius æra,
" Credo equidem : vivos ducent de marmore vultus ;
" Orabunt causas melius ; cœlique meatus
" Describent radio, et surgentia sidera dicent ;
" Tu regere imperio, populos, Romane, memento :
" Hæ tibi erunt artes ; pacisque imponere morem,
" Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos."

Æn. lib. vi.

" The subject nations, with a happier grace,
" From the rude stone may call the mimic face,
" Shine at the bar, describe the stars on high,
" The motions, laws, and regions of the sky....
" Be this your nobler praise in time to come,
" These your imperial arts, ye sons of Rome ;
" O'er distant realms to stretch your awful sway,
" To bid those nations tremble and obey ;
" To crush the proud, the suppliant foe to rear,
" To give mankind the peace, or shake the world with war."

Pitt.

Critics have established a further distinction with respect to the sublime, in what they call the *still* sublime, and the sublime of *passion*. The former however is the true sublime, though we find this quality not unfrequently mingled with each of the different passions. The following, from a work which yields not in sublimity to any thing in the English language, without excepting the Paradise Lost, will serve as a specimen of what I term the *still* sublime. It will also serve as an example of the sublime in expression, as the imagery and epithets are exceedingly rich....

" Night, sable goddess, from her ebon throne,
" In rayless majesty, now stretches forth
" Her leaden sceptre o'er a slumbering world.
" Silence how dead ! and darkness how profound !
" Nor eye nor list'ning ear can object find.
" Creation sleeps....'Tis as the general pulse
" Of Life stood still, and nature made a pause :.....
" An awful pause, prophetic of her end.
" And let her prophecy be soon fulfill'd :
" Fate, drop the curtain. I can lose no more."

Night Thoughts.

Of the sublime of passion we have a very fine instance in a speech of Othello....

" Had it pleas'd Heaven
" To try me with afflictions; had he rain'd
" All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head;
" Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips;
" Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes:
" I should have found in some part of my soul
" A drop of patience".....

In the same play, and in the impassioned scenes of Lear, many other fine examples will be found.

An author, whose fine taste and brilliant imagination will ever be admired, and to whose memory his country has still stronger obligations, has written an elegant treatise on the distinction between the sublime and beautiful. The pleasure which is afforded by the contemplation of beauty appears a pure and unmixed pleasure arising from the gentler agitation, and is less vivid than that produced by the sublime. The sublime also differs from the beautiful, in being only conversant with great objects. It differs from the pathetic, in affording a more tranquil pleasure. The sublime and beautiful are, however, frequently mixed, and seem to run into each other, as in that enchanting simile of Homer, into which Mr. Pope has transposed more of the beautiful than is in the original....

" As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
" O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light;
" When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
" And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene.
" Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
" And stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole;
" O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,
" And tip with silver every mountain's head;
" Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise,
" A flood of glory bursts from all the skies.
" The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,
" Eye the blue vault, and bless the sacred light."

Pope's Iliad.

Of some descriptions also it is not easy to determine whether they belong to the sublime or the pathetic. Such is the short delineation by St. Luke, of the feelings of the multitude on the sufferings and crucifixion of our Lord....." And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned."

LETTER V.

IV.....THE PATHETIC.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN my last letter I intimated that the sublime is often connected with the pathetic, though I confess the greater passions assimilate more readily with sublime ideas than the tender and sympathetic.

The force of pathetic composition arises from that fine sense which the Author of our nature has implanted in us for the wisest and best of purposes, which engages us as social beings to partake in the feelings of others; to "rejoice with those who do rejoice, and to weep with those who weep;" or, as a heathen writer expresses it,

> "Mollissima corda
> "Humano generi dare se natura fatetur,
> "Quæ lachrymas dedit." *Juvenal.*

> "Compassion proper to mankind appears,
> "Which nature witness'd when she gave us tears."
> *Tate.*

It is of little consequence whether the tale that excites this sensation in us is real or fictitious. It is the general sentiment that is instantaneously called into action, and we do not stop to consider and to reason upon it; it is sufficient if it is only natural.

As is the case with the sublime, there are two principal circumstances which are productive of this affection:....First, when the story or sentiment is sufficiently striking of itself, by reducing all the circumstances into as narrow a compass as possible, and causing them to flash at once upon the mind. Of this, Livy's account of the death of Lucretia may serve as an example: in

which the short sentence "Conclamant vir, paterque," has a great effect. An injudicious writer would in this case have introduced long and laborious speeches, and have destroyed both nature and pathos.

The other mode of exciting pathetic feelings is by dilating on the subject, and bringing to view every tender and pathetic circumstance. For an historical example of this, I need only refer to the description of Agrippina's return after the death of Germanicus, in Tacitus. A charming example also may be found in the Song of Deborah and Barak, in the book of Judges, where the mother of Sisera is described as anxiously expecting his return:

"Through the window she looked and cried out,
"The mother of Sisera through the lattice;
"Wherefore is his chariot so long in coming?
"Wherefore linger the wheels of his chariot?
"Her wise ladies answer her;
"Yea she returns answer to herself:
"Have they not found....have they not divided the spoil,
"To every man a damsel, yea a damsel or two?
"To Sisera a spoil of divers colours,
"A spoil for the neck, of divers colours of needle-work."

It depends upon the taste and skill of the writer to employ that mode of exciting pathetic emotions which is best adapted to his subject. The circumstantial method, though the most general, and indeed the most powerful, is very apt, in unskilful hands, to become frigid declamation. I never, on this account, could admire the French tragedies. Racine has less of bombast than Corneille, and Voltaire perhaps than either.

There are some circumstances, the antient critics would call them common-places, which when judiciously resorted to, will be found very productive of pathetic emotions.

1st. When innocent and helpless persons are involved in ruin. To introduce an infant on the stage in a tragedy, though a common trick, is seldom destitute of effect. If however there are many to participate in the

misfortune, the partnership in sorrow seems to lessen its weight. The scenes between Arthur and Hubert in King John, are exquisitely touching; and the pathos in Othello is greatly heightened by the youth and innocence of Desdemona, and her absence from her father and her relations.

2d. A violent abruption from a state of enjoyment:

"Now warm in love, now with'ring in my bloom,
"Lost in a convent's solitary gloom!
"There stern religion quench'd th' unwilling flame,
"There died those best of passions, love and fame."
Pope's Eloisa.

3d. The recollection of past happiness, or happiness that might have been attained but for some intervening circumstance, is a fine source of the pathetic. On this are founded some of our best tragedies....See the Orphan, also the last act of the Fair Penitent....

"Still as thy form before my mind appears,
"My haggard eyes are bath'd in gushing tears;
"Thy lov'd idea rushes to my heart,
"And stern despair suspends the lifted dart.
"O could I burst those fetters which restrain
"My struggling limbs, and waft thee o'er the main,
"To some far distant shore, where ocean roars
"In horrid tempests round the gloomy shores;
"To some wild mountain's solitary shade,
"Where never European faith betray'd."
The Dying Negro.

4th. Absence from persons very dear. The whole of that inimitable poem, Mr. Pope's Eloisa, affords a fine example of this; and particularly the following lines:

".....No fly me, fly me, far as pole from pole;
"Rise Alps between us, and whole oceans roll!
"Ah! come not, write not, think not once of me."

5th. Exile.....

" Methinks we wandering go
" Through dreary wastes, and weep each other's woe,
" Where round some mould'ring tower pale ivy creeps,
" And low-brow'd rocks hang nodding o'er the deeps."
Eloisa.

6th. Inattention to self in extreme distress, and solicitude for others. Thus Lear to Kent in the storm.....

" Prithee go in thyself; seek thine own ease....
" Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
" That bide the pelting of this pityless storm,
" How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
" Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
" From seasons such as these."

Such also is the exhortation of our Saviour: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children."

The Holy Scriptures, which I hope, both as a man of virtue and of taste, you will never cease to read, contain perhaps the very finest instances extant of the pathetic. Who can read aloud the parable of the prodigal son, and not shed a tear? Of Nathan's parable I have already spoken.

The *tender* is a branch of the pathetic, in which however misery or sorrow are not necessary adjuncts. Here a relief from sorrow, or expected sorrow, is a powerful instrument. Thus Goldsmith, who in the tender excels almost every modern writer:

" Forbid it, Heaven, the hermit cried,
" And clasp'd her to his breast;
" The wond'ring fair one turn'd to chide,
" 'Twas Edwin's self that press'd."
Edwin and Angelina.

The tender however will sometimes be found in a scene of perfect tranquillity; and it must be remarked that the expression of tenderness is the great excellence in the fine Madonna's of the Italian school of painting.

In the Scripture, the finest examples of this will also be found, as for instance, Isaiah xlix. 14, 15.

"But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me....Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb: yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee."

LETTER VI.

V.....THE LUDICROUS.

MY DEAR JOHN,

THE transition from the pathetic to the ludicrous will appear rather violent, though, if you take Dr. Hartley's opinion on the subject, laughing and crying are more nearly allied than is vulgarly supposed. "*Laughter*," says he, "is a nascent *cry* raised by pain, or the apprehension of pain, suddenly checked, and repeated at very short intervals." I do not, however, press the doctor's opinion upon you; for really if I was called upon for an example of the ridiculous, I do not know that I should not quote this passage as soon as any of the notions attributed to the mock philosophers, so happily ridiculed by Butler....who knew

> "Where entity and quiddity,
> "The ghosts of defunct bodies, lie;
> "Where truth in person does appear,
> "Like words congeal'd in northern air.
> "Who knew the seat of paradise,
> "Could tell in what degree it lies.....
> "What Adam dreamt of when his bride
> "Came from the closet in his side," &c.

It may serve to shew you, however, the general inanity of metaphysical speculations, which I advise you by all means to avoid, and to what lengths of folly human reason will go, when it pretends to account for every thing.

Though we discard, however, Dr. Hartley's theory of the ridiculous, yet I think we may fairly say that it always arises from a striking contrast suddenly brought before the mind by an unexpected combination or association of ideas. Contrast alone, unless connected with

the terrific or some strong passion, has a tendency to excite risible emotions. Children whose animal spirits are very active, and whose perceptions are vivid, will frequently be disposed to laugh, at seeing a man with one leg much thicker than the other, or at an animal with only one ear. One of the finest instances of strong sublime contrast that I remember, was when Mr. Burke, in one of his speeches in the house, called the extravagant French reformers "Architects of ruin;" and Pope affords an instance of witty contrast in his ridicule of Timon's villa.....

"Lo! what huge heaps of littleness around;
"The whole a labour'd quarry above ground."

The contrast must not however be too violent, nor must it involve any thing of too serious a nature, for in that case, a different train of ideas would be excited, which would destroy the ridiculous effect. A better instance it is impossible to give than the celebrated distich from the great master in wit and humour, the point and ridicule of which is wholly independent of the double rhyme.

"When pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,
"Was beat with fist, instead of a stick."

And again.....

"We grant, altho' he had much wit,
"He was very shy of using it;
"As being loth to wear it out,
"And therefore bore it not about,
"Unless on holidays or so,
"As men their best apparel do."

In these instances, the contrast is strong between a pulpit and a drum; and wit and a suit of clothes. Yet, in the first instance, both (the pulpit and the drum) were made use of to excite a multitude to arms; here was a curious agreement found out, and both were *beaten*,

but the ridiculous contrast is again brought to view, the one was beaten with *a fist*, the other with *a stick*.

In the other quotation there is a mixture of irony; for it is meant to imply that Sir Hudibras had no wit at all, but was in reality, as described in another place,

> ....." a tool
> " Which knaves do work with, call'd a fool."

Yet the drollery is exquisite in the agreement which the writer finds out between the parsimony of his hero, and that of a miser with respect to his holiday suit. The irony is displayed particularly in the couplet:

> " As being loth to wear it out,
> " And therefore bore it not about."

On the subject of irony I shall have something more to add, when I treat of the figures of rhetoric.

Metaphysicians have established three relations as influencing the chain of our ideas upon different occasions, there are....1st. *Contiguity in time or place.* 2d. *Cause and effect.* 3d. *Resemblance or contrariety.**

Under these heads may be correctly classed, the various causes of that fanciful agreement which produce risible emotions. I. Under that of *contiguity* we may arrange,

1st. Bodily singularities, including a grotesque dress or manner.

2d. Groups of contrasted figures, such as an old popular caricature which I remember, of " A Macaroni Alderman and his Rib." The one a squat bloated figure dressed in the extravagance of fashion, the other an extremely tall and meagre female in a dress remarkably prim and formal. I may instance another which is yet popular, " A country Clown placed between a Counsellor and an Attorney."

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* See the Economy of Nature, b. x. c. 4.

3d. A confused assemblage of incongruous ideas, such as often takes place in a play to which you used to be partial, Cross Purposes; and in the cross readings of the newspaper columns. Of this kind of humour some excellent specimens were afforded by the writers of the Rolliad, the Probationary Odes, &c.

4th. Meanness and dignity brought together in contact. Under this head we may class the anticlimax, and what the writers of Martinus Scriblerus style the *bathos* .....one of the happiest specimens of which is,

> " And thou, Dalhousie, the great god of war,
> " Lieutenant-colonel to the earl of Mar."

Perhaps I might add a specimen from Mr. Pope himself....

> " Grac'd as thou art with all the pow'r of words,
> " So known, so honour'd in the house of Lords."

II. Under *cause and effect* we may place,

1st. Ironical reasoning, and much also of what is called analogical reasoning, which is often as ridiculous as fanciful. As for instance....

" What does it signify (quoth Albertus) whether my nephew exceeds in the cursus or not? Speed is often a symptom of cowardice, witness hares and deer."...MEM. OF MART. SCRIB.

2d. Cause and effect not corresponding with each other....whence

3d. Ridiculous hyperbole and rant,...

> " Behold a scene of misery and woe!
> " Here Argus soon might weep himself quite blind,
> " Ev'n though he had Briareus' hundred hands,
> " To wipe those hundred eyes.
> " He roar'd so loud, and look'd so wondrous grim,
> " His very shadow durst not follow him."

4th. Much of what is called caricature....

" Some have been beaten till they know
" What wood a cudgel's of by the blow;
" Some kick'd, until they can feel whether
" A shoe be Spanish or neat's leather." *Hud.* p. ii. l. 2.

III. But of all the relations that of resemblance is the most fruitful of ludicrous ideas.

1st. Of these, the more fanciful and unexpected the resemblance, the greater in general will be the effect. Thus Butler describes the horse of his hero:....

" The beast was sturdy, large and tall,
" With mouth of meal and eyes of wall:
" I would say eye, for h'ad but one,
" As most agree, though some say none.
" He was well stay'd, and in his gait,
" Preserv'd a grave majestic state.
" At spur or switch no more he skipt,
" Nor mended pace, than Spaniard whipt;
" And yet so fiery, he would bound,
" As if he griev'd to touch the ground;
" Thus Cæsar's horse, who as fame goes,
" Had corns upon his feet and toes,
" Was not by half so tender hooft,
" Nor trod upon the ground so soft.
" And as the beast would kneel and stoop
" (Some write) to take his rider up;
" So Hudibras his, ('tis well-kown)
" Would often do to set him down."

The whole spirit of this passage, you will easily see, depends on the allusions. The *majestic* state of the horse, which scorned to mend his pace, contrasted with the tenderness of his feet, and the comparison with that of Cæsar, are highly ludicrous.

Contrariety, or contrast, is classed under the same head of association, by logical writers, as resemblance, and of the witty application of this we have a fine instance in the four last lines which I have just quoted; and in the following from Swift's verses on his death.

" My female friends, whose tender hearts
" Have better learn'd to act their parts,

" Receive the news in doleful dumps:
" The Dean is dead (pray what is trumps?)
" The Lord have mercy on his soul!
" (Ladies I'll venture for the vole.)
" Six deans they say must bear his pall,
" (I wish I knew what king to call.)
" Madam, your husband will attend
" The fun'ral of so good a friend?
" No, madam, 'tis a shocking sight,
" And he's engag'd to-morrow night:
" My lady Club would take it ill,
" If he should fail her at quadrille.
" He lov'd the Dean (I lead a heart;)
" But dearest friends, they say, must part."

The most fruitful source of the burlesque and the mock-heroic is, when the allusion is from the great to the mean or little.

" The Greeks renown'd, so Homer writes,
" For well-soal'd boots, as well as fights." *Hud.*

The order is reversed, however, in some instances of the mock-heroic, as in the Lutrin of Boileau, and the charming Rape of the Lock.

" This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
" Nourish'd two locks, which graceful hung behind
" In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck
" With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.
" Love in these labyrinths her slaves detains,
" And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.
" With hairy springes we the birds betray,
" Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey;
" Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,
" And beauty draws us with a single hair."

In these lines, and in all the poem, a slight circumstance is magnified into something of apparent importance. The card party is an admirable instance in point....

" Behold four kings in majesty rever'd,
" With hoary whiskers and a forked beard;

" And four fair queens whose hands sustain a flower,
" Th' expressive emblem of their softer power;
" Four knaves in garbs succinct, a trusty band,
" Caps on their heads, and halberts in their hand;
" And party-colour'd troops, a shining train,
" Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain."

I recommend to your perusal the whole description of the card party, in which the allusion to a battle is finely supported.

I may add a more ludicrous example:

" The kettle-drum, whose sullen dub,
" Sounds like the hooping of a tub." *Hud.*

In all the instances of the ridiculous which I have quoted, you will easily see that the suddenness of the combination forms the chief merit of the witticism, as in the description of the horse from Butler, where the author appears to correct himself.

" I should say eye, for h'ad but one,
" As authors write, though some say none."

A witty as well as most eloquent senator of our own times, has often employed this stroke of humour with infinite effect, appearing suddenly to correct himself, when he would insinuate something in an indirect manner.

Critics are not entirely agreed in defining the distinction between wit and humour. I am inclined to think it is more accurate to class risible objects as I have classed them, as depending upon the different sources of mental association. But if it was absolutely necessary to make the distinction, I would call that *wit* where the unexpected comparison or combination is made in the very words, as in the passage of Hudibras, quoted by, I think, Lord Kaimes....

" The sun had long since in the lap
" Of Thetis taken out his nap;
" And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn
" From black to red began to turn."

Also what Dryden makes his renegado say of priests, which by the way is stolen by Mr. Hume in one of his essays....

"And having found what Archimedes wanted, a new world to rest on, you move this world as you please."

I would call that humour, on the contrary, when the mind of the hearer or reader is only led to make the comparison or combination itself. Thus when a ludicrous character is depicted, the reader's mind of itself opposes to it the proper character. I may instance the two following lines:

"And the gaunt mastiff, growling at the gate,
"Affrights the beggar whom he longs to eat."

Where a number of opposite ideas are immediately excited without being expressed. I may quote also the description of Hudibras's dagger.....

"It was a serviceable dudgeon,
"Either for fighting or for drudging.
"When it had stabb'd or broke a head,
"It would scrape trenchers, or chip bread;
"Toast cheese or bacon, though it were
"To bait a mousetrap, 'twould not care.
"'Twould make clean shoes, or in the earth
"Set leeks, and onions, and so forth.
"It had been 'prentice to a brewer,
"Where this and more it did endure;
"But left the trade as many more
"Have lately done on the same score."

During the nine last lines the mind is constantly making a comparison between the low uses to which it has been applied, and the proper uses of a dagger.

This appears to me the proper cause of the power of irony, that the reader's mind is constantly making a comparison between the alleged motives, or character, and the real ones. Take as an instance Arbuthnot's account of what passed in London when the comet was expected:

"If the reverend clergy shewed more concern than others, I charitably impute it to their great charge of souls; and what confirmed me in this opinion was, that the degrees of apprehension and terror could be distinguished to be greater or less, according to their ranks and degrees in the church."

To the same cause we may attribute often the ludicrous effect of cant and low phrases, namely, that the mind contrasts them with the proper ones.....

"For which the stubborn Greeks sat down,
"So many years before Troy *town*." *Hud.*

"Sir Hudibras had but one spur,
"As wisely-knowing could he stir
"To active trot one side of 's horse,
"The other would not hang an arse."

This definition of wit and humour will accord with the two homely lines of Buckingham, when speaking of comedy.....

"Humour is all, wit should be only brought,
"To turn agreeably some proper thought."
Essay on Poetry.

There is an inferior species of wit, which results from confounding the proper and figurative meaning of an expression, as in these lines of Butler:....

"While thus the lady talk'd, the knight
"Turn'd th' outside of his eyes to white,
"As men of inward light are wont
"To turn their optics in upon't."

This species of wit would scarcely stand the test which Mr. Addison proposes for real wit, that of being translated into another language. It approaches indeed very near to the *pun*, which I need not inform you is a play upon words according to the different senses in which they are used. Of these we have many instances in Shakspeare, such as Falstaff's address to the prince,

when he accosts him in the character of king:...."God save thy grace; majesty I should have said, for grace thou wilt have none."

Even the chaste and correct Pope is not above a pun....

"Here thou, great Anna, whom three realms obey,
"Dost sometimes counsel take, and sometimes tea."

LETTER VII.

LANGUAGE.....PERSPICUITY.....PURITY.

MY DEAR JOHN,

HAVING laid before you the principal materials or rather sources of good writing, I must now call your attention to a subject, which I fear you will think less interesting and entertaining, the correct and elegant use of language.

The only foundation of a good style, as far as respects the use of words, is an extensive and accurate knowledge of the language in which we write. One of the principal advantages resulting from a knowledge of the dead languages indeed is, that it acquaints us with the etymology of the many words which are derived from them, and that is often the most certain guide to their correct application. A knowledge of the Saxon, which is not difficult in attainment, should be added, as well as of French, to make a man perfect master of the radicals of his own language. Yet even this is not enough; he must also carefully mark the different senses in which words are used by the best authors. Etymology will only lead us to the literal sense; but the figurative senses are so various, that in some words the original and literal meaning is almost forgotten.

Johnson's Dictionary, which is indeed the best Thesaurus I ever saw of any language, will greatly assist you in this respect. It ought to lie on the table of every young writer. I have often found great amusement in turning over its leaves, and observing the different uses to which the same word has been applied according to the genius of different writers. It affords also an encouragement to this kind of study (which would otherwise be what is called *dry*) by the beauty and utility of

the quotations which the author employs to illustrate his definitions. To Dr. Johnson every subsequent English author owes unutterable obligations. He has made straight the paths of British literature, and has even strewed them with flowers.

But a true command of language is at last only to be gained by a diligent perusal of the best authors. Rules and precepts may enable you to avoid some faults, but they never can give elegance and freedom; that magic power which calls up at once the most appropriate terms, and arranges them in the best order. On this account young writers should be wise in their choice of books, and read none which are not written in the best style, at least while employed in the immediate study of composition. I have thought that I derived much advantage from accustoming myself before I sat down to compose, always to read a few pages in some good writer, whose spirit I should wish to catch, as best adapted to the subject on which I was to write. I have heard it said of that great master in the art of painting, Sir Joshua Reynolds, that he always finished his most exquisite paintings with some picture of the ancient masters near him, which harmonized with his subject, and not only kept his imagination in correspondence with it, but even served to invigorate and maintain the enthusiasm of genius.

A young writer should however not peruse cursorily, but study intensely the best authors. When you read an animated and fine description, it may be of service to lay down the book, and pause and consider how *you* would have described the same scene, or the same action; whether you would have chosen the same figures or phrases, or placed the object in a similar light.

Style may be divided into two kinds, the *plain* and the *ornamented*. To a perfect style of either description three qualities are indispensably necessary, *perspicuity*, *purity* and *harmony;* and the plainer the style the more indispensable are these requisites.

"By perspicuity (says Quinctilian) care is taken, not that the hearer may understand if he will; but that he

must understand whether he will or not." Many authors plead the nature of their studies as an excuse for not being perspicuous; but as writing clearly depends on our ideas being clear, it can never be an excuse to say to the world, we do not understand the subject of which we mean to treat. Perspicuity will depend, in the first place, on the choice of words, and secondly, on the arrangement of them. As far as regards the choice of words, obscurity results, in the first place.

From obsolete or affected language, which is not generally understood. The following phrases in our liturgy were, at the time it was composed, good English; but no man at present could employ the words in the same sense...." *Prevent* us, O Lord, in all our doings," &c...," O Lord, deal not with us *after* our sins, neither reward us *after* our iniquities." In the apostles' creed also, "the quick and the dead" would be more intelligible than "the living and the dead." Many abuses of words have been introduced from the French idiom. Lord Bolingbroke, for instance, says, "by the persons I *intend* here," instead of I *mean*. Analogous to this is the use of Latinisms, as *integrity* to denote *entireness; conscience* for *consciousness:* "The *conscience* of approving one's self a benefactor to mankind is the noblest recompence for being so."....SPECTATOR.

Again, obscurity proceeds from the use of ambiguous or indefinite words. Examples of this occur in the following sentences: "As for such animals as are *mortal* (or noxious) we have a right to destroy them."..... GUARDIAN, No. 61. "The Christians rudely disturbed the service of paganism; and rushing in crowds round the tribunals of the magistrates, called upon them to pronounce and inflict the sentence of the law."....GIBBON. Here it is not easy to define what *service* is meant, whether civil or religious. A similar ambiguity may be found in the same author. Speaking of the cruelty of Valentinian, the historian adds: "The merit of Maximin, who had slaughtered the noblest families of Rome, was rewarded with the royal approbation and the prefecture of Gaul. Two fierce and enormous bears, dis-

tinguished by the appellations of Innocence and Uricanurea, could alone deserve to *share* the favour of Maximin."....IB. It is evident that we must have recourse to the context to understand that these creatures were not the favourites of Maximin, but of Valentinian.

The following are instances of ambiguity in the use of the same word in different senses:

"Wealth and *honour*, or what we improperly call our interests, have now an ascendant over us; and the passion for each is rarely gratified but at the expense of some virtue. And thus it comes to pass, that though we set out in the world with a warm sense of truth and *honour*, experience by degrees refines us out of these principles."....HURD'S SERM. v. ii. § 3.

"That he should be in earnest it is hard to conceive; since any reasons of doubt which he might have in this case would have been reasons of doubt in the case of other men, who may give *more*, but cannot give *more evident*, signs of thought than their fellow-creatures."....BOLINGBROKE'S PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS, i. s. 9. Here the word *more* is first an adjective, the comparative of *many;* and then an adverb and the sign of the comparative degree. It should be thus reformed...."Who may give *more numerous*, but cannot," &c. "Who may give *more*, but cannot give *clearer* signs."

A writer on criticism has the following sentence: "There appears to be a remarkable difference betwixt one of the *first* of ancient and of modern critics."....OGILVIE. The embarrassment of this sentence would have been entirely avoided, by inserting the words *one of the first* a second time, which probably an apprehension of offending the ear prevented.

The cases are so very numerous, in which an author in the choice of words, or an imprudent use of them, may darken the expression, that it would be almost impossible to prescribe any definite rules upon the subject. Perfection, in this respect, is only to be acquired by practice. Possibly the following remarks may be of some use to young writers.

1st. As I before advised, endeavour to inform yourself perfectly concerning the etymology and meaning of words.

2d. Consult the best modern authors, and observe their different applications. The original sense is not always a certain guide in the use of common words; though, if nicely attended to, it will sometimes help us to the reasons of their application.

3d. Be not too anxious for variety of expression. It is well observed by the Abbe Girard, that when a performance grows dull, it is not so much because the ear is tired by the frequent repetition of the same sound, as because the mind is fatigued by the frequent occurrence of the same idea. Lastly, We cannot be too much on our guard against the vulgar idiom. Most writers who affect ease and familiarity in writing, are apt to slide into it:

> "But ease in writing flows from art, not chance,
> "As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance."

4th. That ambiguity, as well as inaccuracy, is not uncommonly the effect of introducing the vulgar phraseology into written composition, is evident from the very incorrect and absurd use of the verb to *lay*, instead of the neuter verb to *lie*. This solecism has arisen, I presume, from confounding the past tense of the latter with the present of the former verb. Let it be observed, however, that when a noun follows in the objective case, the verb active (to lay) may be used: as, to lay down an employment; and sometimes when the verb is reflected or neutralized; as,

> "Soft on the flow'ry herb I found me laid."

But, to say "Death *lays* upon her like an untimely frost," or to say "I have a work laying by me," would be a gross and intolerable barbarism.

5th. There are certain elliptical forms of expression in common use which require care in the use of them.

least the sense should be obscured to the reader, though to the writer it may appear sufficiently clear....e. g.

"You ought to contemn all the wit in the world against you."....GUARDIAN.

In this sentence, it is remarked by a modern critic, the author does not certainly mean that all the wit in the world is *actually* exerted against the person he addresses; and therefore he should have expressed himself thus: "You ought to despise all the wit, however great it may be, that can be employed against you."

"I beg of you (says Steele) never let the *glory* of our nation, who made France tremble, and yet has the gentleness to be unable to bear opposition from the meanest of his own countrymen, be calumniated in so imprudent a manner, as in the insinuation that he affected a perpetual dictatorship." It is difficult in this sentence to find at first the antecedent to the pronouns *who*, *his*, and *he*; but on consideration, it appears that the *glory* means the Duke of Marlborough, and the difficulty is unravelled. Had the ellipsis been filled up with some such phrase as "the man whom we may justly term the glory, &c." no ambiguity could have occurred.

6th. There are in common use certain phrases which are in themselves equivocal, and consequently often produce obscurity. Such as, *not the least*, *not the smallest*, *nothing less*, which are sometimes expressive of magnitude, and sometimes of the contrary....e. g.

"Your character, &c. assure me, you will not think that clergymen, when injured, have *the least* right to your protection."....GUARDIAN, No. 80.

"He aimed at *nothing less* than the crown," which may imply that he was far from aiming at; or it may signify that nothing less would satisfy him.

"I will *have* mercy and not sacrifice," would be better, "I will *require* mercy," &c....Hos. vii. 6.

"Our English is, among those dialects, *one* that I think more capable of improvement than any other."....MONBODDO ON LANGUAGE, p. ii. b. 1. c. 7.

7th. Hypothetical or contingent expressions often produce obscurity when intended to represent real facts.

For instance, "If he bestowed the gold to relieve the more painful distress of a friend, the sacrifice is of some weight."....GIBBON, vol. iv. p. 265.

"The supine ignorance of the nobles was incapable of discerning the tendency of such representations; they might sometimes chastise, with words and blows, the plebeian reformer; but he was often suffered," &c. ....GIBBON, p. 574.

The obscurity arising from bad arrangement is, however, worse than that which arises from the ill choice of words. Perspicuity is injured, in this respect, in the following instances:....

1st. By separating the adjective from its proper substantive: "They chose to indulge themselves in the hour of *natural* festivity." Better "in the natural hour of festivity."

2d. By using the same pronoun in reference to different persons or things in the same sentence: "And *they* did all eat and were filled: and *they* took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full." By the last *they* it is difficult to say who are meant, the multitude or only the disciples.

3d By the indiscreet or wrong placing of the relative: "Solomon, the son of David, *who* built the temple of Jerusalem, was the richest monarch of his time." Again, "Solomon, the son of David, *who* was persecuted by Saul, was the richest," &c. The *who* in the first sentence relates to Solomon, and in the second to David, and yet is similarly situated. It would be better therefore to give a different turn to the sentence, and say...."Solomon the son of David, and the builder of the temple," &c. "Solomon, whose father David was persecuted," &c.

"The laws of nature are truly what my Lord Bacon styles his aphorisms, laws of laws. Civil laws are always imperfect, and often false deductions from *them*, or applications of *them*; nay, *they* stand in many instances in opposition to *them*."....BOLINGBROKE.

"The perception of the human mind of the essential difference which lies in the nature of things, will direct

it to prize *some* as objects good, and *others* to regard as evil."....MACAULEY ON MORAL TRUTH. The *others* in the last member of the sentence may as well be in apposition to it, and governed by the verb *direct* as governed by the verb regard. The ambiguity would be remedied by iterating the word *objects*, or preserving the natural order.

A certain author, speaking of Porto Bello, says: "This celebrated harbour, *which* was formerly very well defended by forts, *which* Admiral Vernon destroyed in 1740, seems to afford an entrance 600 toises broad; but is so straitened with rocks that are near the surface of the water, that it is reduced to a very narrow channel." ....JUSTAMOND'S TRANS. OF RAYNAL, b. vii. Better thus: "This celebrated harbour was defended, &c....it seems to afford, &c." "This activity drew numbers of enterprising men over to Virginia, who came either in search of fortune, or of liberty, which is the only compensation for the want of it."....*Ibid.* Here the two antecedents are so confounded, that it requires a pause to distinguish them, and the construction is very ungraceful as well as obscure. One mode of avoiding ambiguity in this case will be, when two antecedents occur, putting one of them, if possible, in the plural, and the other in the singular number.

A modern writer (Mr. CUMBERLAND, Mem. vol. ii. p. 152.) uses the following expression: "The Marquis Legarda, governor of Vittoria, to *whom* I had a letter from Count D'Aranda, the Marquis D'Allemanda, and other gentlemen of the place, did us the honour to visit us," &c. It is not clear whether the letter might not have been signed by the Marquis D'Allemanda, &c. The ambiguity might have been avoided by saying, "I had a letter from the Count D'Aranda to the Marquis Legarda, and he and the (or he, as well as the) Marquis D'Allemanda, &c. came to visit us."

3dly. Obscurity is produced by separating the adverb and the adjective, or the adverb and the verb. Ex. "A power is requisite of fixing the intellectual eye upon successive objects so steadily, as that the *more* may ne-

ver prevent us from doing justice to the *less* important." ....OGILVIE ON COMPOSITION, vol. i. p. 94. "This subject is precisely of that kind which a daring imagination could *alone* have adopted."....*Ibid.* Here it is not accurately defined whether a daring imagination only could have adopted, &c. or whether it could have adopted that subject only and no other. "He conjured the senate, that the purity of his reign might not be stained by the blood *even* of a guilty senator."....GIBBON. The arrangement would be more perfect, "by the blood of *even* a guilty senator." "He atoned for the murder of an innocent son, by the execution, *perhaps*, of a guilty wife."....*Ibid.* The doubt in this sentence may apply to the reality of the execution. "Their intimacy had commenced, in the happier period, *perhaps*, of their youth and obscurity."

4thly. The following are examples of ambiguity arising from the wrong position of a conjunction....The historian, speaking of an impolitic edict of Julian, thus expresses himself: "He enacted that, in a time of scarcity, it (corn) should be sold at a price which had seldom been known in the most plentiful years."..... GIBBON. A common reader would infer from the above, that it was a standing order, that corn should in every time of scarcity be sold cheaper than in a time of plenty, which does not appear from the context to be the intention of the author.

"They were much more ancient among the Persians than Zoroaster, or Zerdusht."....BOLINGBROKE. The conjunction here is perfectly equivocal, and the reader will certainly mistake the sense, unless he previously knows that Zoroaster and Zerdusht are the same.

"At least my own private letters leave room for a politician to suspect as much as a penetrating friend of mine tells me."....SPECT. 43. The conjunction is wrong placed here, and the arrangement should be altered thus: "At least my own private letters, as a penetrating friend tells me, leave room," &c.

Speaking of parents misjudging of the conduct of schoolmasters, a modern author on education adds: "It

has broke the peace of many an ingenious man, who had engaged in the care of youth, and paved the way to the ruin of hopeful boys." It is not perfectly clear whether the circumstances or the master "paved the way," &c. It is impossible to decipher the following sentence. Respecting the Pennsylvania marble, of which chimney-pieces, tables, &c. are made, the historian adds: "These valuable materials could not have been found in common in the houses, unless they had been lavished in the churches."

5thly. Perspicuity is injured very frequently by the fear of concluding a sentence with a trifling word; but surely, however ungraceful, a confused style is a much greater blemish. "The Court of Chancery," says a respectable author, "frequently mitigates, and breaks the teeth of the common law." From this sentence it might be inferred, that it mitigated the teeth. Better, therefore: "frequently mitigates the common law, and breaks the teeth of it," or "its teeth."

6thly. It is an old observation, that the desire of brevity generally induces obscurity. This is exemplified in many forms of expression, to which habit serves to reconcile us, but which are in themselves really ambiguous. Thus we speak of "the Reformation of Luther;" which, if the circumstance was not well understood, might mean the reformation of the man, instead of the reformation of the church.

7thly. An error opposite to this is long sentences and parentheses. Long periods, however, seldom create obscurity, when the natural order of thought is preserved; especially if each division, clause, or member of the sentence, is complete in itself. It is in general the insertion of foreign matter, and parenthetical sentences, that confuse a style.

It is impossible to indicate, or even to class the various causes of ambiguity or obscurity. The few I have instanced may serve to awaken attention to this important point; a clear head and diligent study are the only certain means of securing the beauty of perspicuity in style.

But whatever value we may set upon this great essential, there is not any excellence which more recommends style than *purity*. This quality is indeed commonly confounded with *elegance;* though I think elegance implies something more, and necessarily includes some idea of ornament. There is no quality too, which is more easily attained. Nature, or to speak more properly, Providence, must give genius; by hard study knowledge is acquired; but a little attention, with polite reading and polite company, will give purity of style.

A writer of some eminence, with whom I was acquainted in my youth, Dr. Gilbert Stuart, used to assert that the language of books, or composition, was entirely different from the language of conversation. Dr. Stuart was a North Briton, and made the observation at the time when the dialect of that country was much less pure than it is at present. He therefore must be understood as referring to a provincial idiom, otherwise the observation is not true. Polite conversation may be termed a loose and free kind of composition; or composition may be regarded as conversation, pruned, corrected, and refined. We should otherwise write as in a dead language, and our style would not be natural and easy, but artificial and pedantic, both of which I consider as offences against purity. On this occasion I shall pursue the same order as before, and consider purity of style, first, as it regards the choice of words; and secondly, as referring to arrangement.

The offences against purity of style, as far as respects the choice of words, may be reduced to the following heads:....1st. Obsolete, or uncommon expressions. 2d. Vulgarisms. 3d. Jargon, or cant.

1st. In an age of novelty we have very little to apprehend from obsolete expressions. Scarcely any person, who is at all conversant with polite company, would use such expressions as *behoof*, *behest*, *peradventure*, *sundry*, *anon*, *whereof*, *erewhile*, *whereas*, *fantasy*, &c. It is not a very easy matter to determine the era of pure English; but I think we should not look further back than

the Revolution. Hooker, Bacon, Milton, Hobbes, and even Temple, are scarcely to be considered as authorities in this respect.

2d. Contrary to this, is the more fashionable error of using affected language, and particularly Gallicisms. This nation has been little indebted to the literature of France; and we have no occasion to change the bullion of our language for the tinsel of theirs. A modern critic has, with great accuracy, collected a variety of these newly imported phrases: such as *opiniatre, partie, dernier resort, beaux arts, belles lettres, politesse, delicatesse, hauteur*, for *opiniative* or *positive, rally, last resort, liberal arts, polite literature, politeness, delicacy, haughtiness*. These he very properly calls "stray words or exiles," that have no affinity to our language, and indeed are no better than insects of the day. It is of the utmost importance to literature to adopt some standard of language; there is no setting bounds to the liberty of coining words, if it is at all admitted; and, in that case, the invaluable productions of our ancestors will soon become unintelligible.

3d. But the more dangerous vice, because it is the more common, is vulgarity. Some instances of this, however, are to be found in very approved authors, and seem to demonstrate how necessary it is to be guarded against it. Lord Kaimes speaks of the comedies of Aristophanes "*wallowing* in looseness and detraction," (which is moreover a false metaphor;) of "the *pushing* genius of a nation; of a nation being *devoid* of *bowels*," &c. The following phrase is surely intolerably low for serious composition: "To imagine that the gratifying of any sense, or the indulging of any delicacy in meat, drink, or apparel, is in itself a vice, can never *enter into* a *head* that is not disordered."....HUME'S ESSAY ON REFINEMENT. Dr. Beattie is not free from such expressions: as a "*long winded* rhetorician," "*screaming, squalling*," &c. Dr. Blair speaks "of the subject *in hand*," of Milton having "*chalked out*" a new road in poetry; of Achilles "*pitching upon* Briseis." The following passages are from the same author: "It is strange

how a writer so accurate as Dean Swift should have *stumbled* on so improper an application of this particle," &c. "When we have arrived at what we expected was to be the conclusion, unexpectedly some circumstance *pops out*, which ought to have been omitted."....BLAIR'S LECT.

In turning over a few pages of Dr. Robertson, one of the most correct of our historians, I find such phrases as the following:

"That by their presence they might be the better able to persuade their countrymen to *fall in* with his proposals. A cause entrusted to such able and zealous advocates could not *well miss* of coming to a happy issue."

"He *took hold* of the regent by the *proper handle*, and endeavoured to *bring about* a change in his sentiments," &c.

"The love of the which is so natural to all, that in every age they (improbable rumours) have been *swallowed* without examination."

"But during these vigorous proceedings of the protestants, they stood confounded, and *at gaze*."

"Which *must needs* prove fatal to both;" "and that the matter would seem to be *huddled up*;" and in Mr. Hume we meet with many such, as "carrying matters with a *high hand*," &c.

Mr. Burke, whose name every scholar and every patriot must venerate, was far from being choice in his expressions; and I grieve to find that our parliamentary oratory has even declined since his time. Nothing indeed has a greater tendency to debase eloquence than that taste for the ludicrous which has been introduced into the debates of parliament, where it seems latterly to be the principal aim of the first speakers to try who can best act the buffoon.

I shall select a few specimens of the vulgar from a pamphlet of the incomparable author whom I have just mentioned, not to lessen his fame, for that no effort of mine could do, was I even inclined to act an invidious

part; but as a caution to avoid faults into which genius itself can glide.

"They pursue even such as me into the obscurest retreats, and *haul* them before their revolutionary tribunals."....LETTER TO A NOBLE LORD.

"Astronomers have supposed that if a comet, whose path intersected the ecliptic, had met the earth, it would have *whirled* us along with it, into *God knows* what regions of heat and cold."....IBID.

"At the same time a sort of national convention *nosed* parliament in the very seat of its authority."....IBID.

"These obscene harpies flutter over our heads, and *eouse* down upon our tables."....IBID.

"For this reason I proposed to reduce it (the pension list) lest, if left without a general limit, it might *eat up* the civil list."....IBID.

"No other of the crown funds did I *meddle* with."....IBID.

"In my speech to the electors of Bristol, when I was *put out* of that representation."....IBID.

"Great and learned men thought that my studies were not wholly *thrown away*," &c.

A great critic has indeed said that sometimes a common expression is more significant than what is deemed an elegant one; and I am inclined to grant that the aptness of these words renders it difficult always to reject them. When, however, we meet with a low word, we ought diligently to look for one synonymous to it. It would probably be a very improving exercise to make a collection, as they occur, of choice and elegant expressions, which may be employed instead of the common and colloquial. Thus, for *heaping up*, we may use *accumulating*; for *shunned, avoided*; for to *brag*, to *boast*; for their *betters*, their *superiors*; for *handed down, transmitted*; for I *got rid of*, I *avoided*; for *shut out, exclude*; for *set free, exempted*; for *broke* his *word, violated* his *promise*; for *gave up, sacrificed*; for *stirred up, excited*; for an expedient *fallen upon, devised*; for *pitched upon, chosen*; for *cry up, extol*. A polite writer, instead of saying he is *pushed on*, will say *urged* or *impelled*; in-

stead of *going forwards* or *go on*, *proceed*; instead of you *take me*, you *understand*; instead of *I had as lief*, *I should like as well*; instead of a *moot point*, a *disputed point*; instead of *by the bye*, *by the way*; (though I do not much approve of either;) instead of *shut* our ears, *close* our ears; instead of *fell to work*, *began*. Some words it will be better to omit, as, instead of saying, "he has a considerable share of merit," say, "he has considerable merit."

When an idiom can be avoided, and a phrase strictly grammatical be introduced, the latter will always be most graceful: for instance, it is more elegant to say, "I *would* rather," than "I *had* rather." This idiom probably took its rise from the abbreviation I'd, which in conversation stands equally for I would, or I had.

When a substitute cannot be found for a mean word, it is better to reform the sentence altogether, and to express it by periphrasis.

4th. Another fault, against which writers who live at a distance from the metropolis ought to be particularly on their guard, is the use of provincial expressions. A student thus circumstanced should constantly compare the dialect of his own country with that of the best authors, and should endeavour to mark and distinguish all the provincialisms. That this observation is not without its use is evident, when we find even such an author as Dr. Blair employing such expressions as the following:.....

"Vol. ii. p. 206...."The middle pitch is that which he employs in common conversation, and which he should use *for ordinary* in public discourse."

Ib. p. 225....."We *will* read him without pleasure, or most probably we shall soon *give over* to read him at all."

Ib. p. 62...."The representing them both as subject," &c.

Ib. p. 109....."Without having attended to this we *will* be at a loss," &c.

Ib. p. 234...."There are few great occasions of pub-

lic speaking in which one *will* not derive assistance from cultivated taste."

Purity of style, as far as respects arrangement, is equally violated by affected stateliness, and by negligence. Of the former kind are the following instances:

1st. Placing the nominative case after the verb. Ex. "Wonderful are the effects of this passion in every view." "Not a little elegant is this manner of writing." "The demands of nature and necessity was he accustomed to say."...GIBBON.

2dly. The objective case in the beginning of the sentence. "Varieties of national character we observe imprinted on the physiognomy of nations." And not unlike this is Mr. Gordon's very depraved construction in his translation of Tacitus: "At this time war there was none."

3dly. The objective case before the imperative mood. "How many nations have certainly fallen from that importance which they had formerly borne among the societies of mankind, let the annals of the world declare."

"Suppose a man (says a witty writer) should gravely address a friend in such language as this: Into the garden let us walk, of flowers it is full, of fruit I think you are fond, on the trees some peaches are to be found, apricots this year I have none, to tea we shall return.... what would he be thought? He would be thought a coxcomb and a pedant."

II. *Negligence*....I know nothing that more enfeebles a style than beginning sentences with connective particles, such as, and, though, but, however, therefore, &c. It seems to put the reader out of breath, and partakes, in some measure, of the ungracefulness and confusion of long sentences.

It also destroys that compactness which gives energy to style. These circumstances have made it common to introduce the connective as the second or third word of the sentence: and the same reasons are almost equally forcible against the use of relatives in the beginning of sentences.

It has also been generally esteemed ungraceful to conclude a sentence with a preposition or a trifling word. The auxiliary verbs are generally very bad conclusions. Ex. "If this affects him, what must the first motion of his zeal be?"...ROBINSON'S ESSAY ON A SERMON.

"Youth and health are with difficulty made to comprehend how frail a machine the human body *is*, and how easily impaired by excesses." Better: "How frail a machine is the human body."....HURD. v. 21. It gives force to a period to complete the sense only with the last word.

Lastly. There is often inelegance in placing the adverb before the auxiliary verb, as in the following instance: "The question stated in the preceding chapter never has been fully considered." It would I think be better "has never been fully," &c.

It would be impossible, in the limits of a letter, to descend to a very minute detail. A good taste, and the perusal of good authors, must unite to form a good style in this particular. Pedantry, however, more frequently misleads us than any other cause.

The style of female authors flows easier, and is commonly more harmonious, than that of professed scholars. One general rule may indeed be admitted: in narrative or plain didactic composition, in those which are intended merely to convey information, the natural order of the words is to be preferred; but, when passion or sublimity is the object, this order may be departed from, and a sentence must never conclude with a weak member or a trifling word. As perspicuity demands that enough shall be displayed in the first part of the sentence to make the aim of it manifest; so elegance and vivacity demand a degree of energy at the termination, in order to leave an impression on the mind. Sometimes, however, in very animated expression, it has a good effect to place the emphatic word the first in order, as, "Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord." "*Silver* and *gold* have I none, but such

as I have I give thee." In this last sentence, the eager expectation, and the imploring look of the beggar naturally lead to a vivid conception of what was in his thoughts; and this conception is answered by the form in which the declaration of the apostle is couched.

LETTER VIII.

HARMONY.....SENTENCES.

MY DEAR JOHN,

THE third quality of a good style, whether plain or ornamented, is *harmony*. The fable, that a swarm of bees settled on the cradle of Plato, as emblematical of the future sweetness of his style, seems to have been invented, like many other pretended presages, only to suit the event. The sweetness and harmony of Plato must, however, be allowed to be his greatest excellence, and that quality seems principally to have given him popularity and lasting fame. But Plato is not the only author who has been elevated into high reputation by his style. The harmony of style must greatly depend upon the writer possessing a fine and well-tuned ear, and this no critical rules can furnish; yet it is possible that, aided by the perusal of good authors, they may contribute to the correcting of a deficient ear, or the improvement of a good one. Without harmony of style the best matter will weary or disgust; with it very indifferent books have attracted at least a temporary popularity. We have one author in our language whose only excellence, I might almost say, was the finest ear that perhaps ever fell to the lot of any writer.....I speak of Lord Bolingbroke. The poverty and triteness of his matter sink him beneath most of the writers of his age, and yet it is almost impossible to read his productions without being charmed: there is in his periods the charm of magic.

I have not a doubt that the harmony of prose compositions pleases upon the same principles with those of verse; and that something like a metrical arrangement may be traced in the style of our best prose writers.

This observation will be less clear and obvious to those who are only acquainted with modern verse. There so much has been given to the rhyme, that little attention has been paid to the charm of numbers; and there is a sameness in the measure which inevitably tires the ear. The French verse is all in dactyls;* the English in iambics or trochaics. Even our blank verse has too much of monotony to please for any length of time. This is not the case with the Greek and Latin hexameter verses. In them there is such a mixture of dactyls and spondees, that you will scarcely ever find two succeeding lines alike. This finely diversifies the measure, and the ear is not wearied by an insipid sameness, while the verse is sufficiently marked by the recurrence of the same sound at the end of the lines.

The harmony of prose numbers, I am well convinced, depends on the judicious admixture of long and short syllables, and the musical, or perhaps metrical conclusion of the periods or sentences. This is an arrangement made by the ear, perhaps without the observation or knowledge of the writer. A fine ear feels what sounds would be agreeable if it heard them pronounced, and naturally, and almost without effort, moulds and forms the sentences in the most pleasing manner. It might be not an unimproving exercise to a student, who is master of Latin prosody, to examine occasionally the usual metre of our best authors; for almost every one will be found to have a metre peculiar to himself. I remember when I was young, I sometimes amused myself in this way. I have no note of the instances, but the results I perfectly recollect.

I found that many long syllables crowded together rendered a style languid and heavy; and this I appre-

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* A dactyl is one long and two short syllables, marked thus: tēgmĭnĕ? a spondee two long syllables, as fāgī; an iambic a short followed by a long syllable..." ăwāke, my St. John," &c. A trochee a long and short one, as glītt'rĭng stōnes ănd gōldĕn things," &c.

hend to be the reason why monosyllables, if too numerous, are unpleasing either in prose or verse.

A style abounding in dactyls will seem rapid, but it wants dignity. You will find the writings of Shaftsbury very much of this description.

Many verses in our common translation of the Bible, and the reading Psalms, you will find almost perfect hexameters. Macpherson's Ossian is throughout metrical, and even monotonous.

A familiar subject will accord well with dactyls and anapestics. A grave uniform style abounds most in trochees and iambics.

A rough and halting style is where, from a deficiency of ear, there is no musical arrangement whatever. What are called round or full periods will be found, I apprehend, to be those, of which the conclusion consists of one or two dactyls, followed by one or two long syllables. Ex. "His empire was enfeebled by the extent of his conquests; and his foreign triumphs terminated in a rebellion at home."

The serious writings of Mr. Addison resemble in their metre those of Lord Bolingbroke, but with this difference, that the style of the former abounds more in short syllables, and is therefore less grave and sonorous. Swift had no ear, and his prose is therefore extremely deficient in harmony; he commonly concludes his sentences with a trochee or an iambic, which renders them mean, and destitute of majesty. The verse of Swift, on the contrary, is fluent, easy, and even harmonious. The reason I conceive to be, that there is something more mechanical in verse than in prose; there are few ears so unmusical as not to be able to comprehend the cadence of verse; but the music of prose is on a more varied scale.

A fault opposite to the harsh and dissonant, for which all the wit and genius of Swift cannot compensate, is monotony. Though one of the chief excellencies of Mr. Hume was his ear, yet I think a reader of nice perceptions will find his style exceedingly monotonous, as well as his vocabulary scanty. He had more taste than genius.

A style to be perfect must be varied in the sound as well as in the language, with a happy mixture of long and short sentences, and the periods not all rounded alike.

Harmony may also be consulted both in the choice of words, and in the mode of placing them. 1st. An attention to harmony demands that we should reject, if we can find synonymous terms, such long, heavy and compound words as *barefacedness*, *wrongheadedness*, *tenderheartedness*, &c.

2dly. We should be sparing in the use of such as crowd together a number of short syllables, and in which the accent is thrown so far back as to give an appearance of stammering in the utterance, such as *primarily*, *cursorily*, *summarily*, *peremptorily*, *peremptoriness*, &c.

3dly. Such as repeat the alike syllable in an awkward and unmusical manner, as *holily*, *farriery*, *sillily*, &c.

In the collocation of words we should also carefully avoid an hiatus, if possible; and I conceive it may be generally done by a slight inversion or transposition.

Swift, whose taste in prose composition I never can approve, though I cannot sufficiently admire his genius, was very angry with the custom of abbreviating the *eths* in the third person singular of verbs, and reducing them to a plain *s*. The truth is however, that the *s* in these instances is pronounced like *z*, which is not a hissing, but a very musical letter; and I may appeal to any ear, whether *has*, and *dies*, and *lies*, are not more harmonious than *hath*, *dieth*, and *lieth*.

Whether it may not have arisen from an early association I am uncertain; from the Scriptures being translated into this kind of language, and its being used by old and venerable writers; but the use of the termination *eth* in the third person seems to me only adapted to solemn or sublime writing. It is well employed by the translator of Ossian, but is stiff and pedantic in Shaftsbury and Swift.

Dr. Middleton, instead of wishing with Swift to abridge the number of monosyllables, adds a very uncouth one to them, by cutting off the last syllable from the word

often; and Mr. Rowe, to soften the language, abridges the monosyllable *them*, by taking away the *th* when the preceding word ends with a consonant. But in general I disapprove of all such abbreviations. They have a tendency to corrupt the structure of our language, without improving its harmony; and are now properly rejected by all good writers.

From what I have stated in the course of this letter, you will perceive that there is a style naturally suited, even in point of harmony, metre, or cadence to particular subjects. The grave and solemn require an equal and majestic succession of sounds; the more violent passions may have longer and fuller periods with more rapidity. But the notion of suiting the sound to the sense, or rather mimicking the motions or the sounds you describe, though attempted by Pope, and recommended by Blair, is extremely puerile, either in prose or verse. The infelicity of Mr. Pope's imitations of this kind ought to be a caution to others not to attempt it. Had his lines.....

> "When Ajax strives some mighty weight to throw,
> "The line too labours, and the words move slow;
> "Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
> "Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main,"

been all the author meant them in this respect, the merit would not have been great. It would have only been like the declaimer who acts his words. Such frivolous attempts are beneath a man of great genius, who, if he has an ear, and is really warmed with his subject, may generally trust to the former to accompany the latter with the appropriate words and sounds.

But though the rules of art cannot furnish that important qualification a good ear, still the ear is, I believe, capable of improvement in style, as well as in vocal or instrumental music. I would therefore recommend, as an exercise, that you would occasionally compose one or more sentences on any given subjects, and try after-

wards to alter the arrangement of the words in different ways, till you find that which is most sonorous, and most likely to please in delivery; or if you would read over your different attempts to some friend who had a really good ear, the exercise would be more perfect.

Another practice which will improve you, not only in harmony, but in fluency and elegance of style, is to read over carefully a short passage in any good author, Addison, Johnson, Robertson or Gibbon; close the book, and try to express the ideas as nearly as you can in their manner. Then compare your attempt with the original.

I do not mean to advise you to play the part of a mere imitator, when you write from yourself; for every author should have a style of his own; but by such exercises as these you will acquire a command of language, and a tase for beauty and harmony.

Before I proceed to the ornamental part of style, properly so called, I wish to premise a few words more connected perhaps with the preceding subject. I might have introduced what I have now to state under the head of perspicuity, but that it is in some measure connected also with harmony; I mean the graceful and elegant construction of a sentence. Aristotle's definition of a sentence is absurd, because it will apply to almost any thing as well as a sentence, and does not give you an idea of that which it is intended to describe. "It is," says he, "a speech, or saying, which has a beginning and end within itself." Dr. Blair is much better, who calls it "a simple proposition or enunciation of thought;" and Dr. Lowth's, with some slight correction, will perhaps be found the most perfect, and comes recommended by its plainness and simplicity: "An assemblage of words, which in themselves make a complete sense."

Though this is a good definition of a sentence, yet it must not be understood to imply that every sentence is confined to the expression of one single act, such as requires only a noun and a verb, with possibly an objective case, such as "He is gone to London." A sentence may embrace several *members*, or little sentences with-

in it, subservient to the principal and governing sense. These latter are called compound sentences; and such are the majority of those which occur in composition.

It is upon selecting properly what members ought to be admitted into a sentence, and arranging them with judgment, that the difficulty in this branch of composition depends; and you will find as much difference in this respect between the sentences of a master in composition, and those of a beginner or an unskilful practitioner, as between the motions of the most graceful stage dancer, and the arrantest clown.

The first rule that I shall lay down with respect to the structure of a sentence, depends immediately upon the definition I have just adopted, that it shall contain one clear proposition or enunciation of thought; and therefore you must be careful never to crowd those circumstances into one sentence, which would be better dispersed into two or more: I select an example from Sir William Temple's Essay on Poetry.

"The usual acceptation," says he, "takes profit and pleasure for two different things, and not only calls the followers or votaries of them by the several names of *busy* and *idle* men, but distinguishes the faculties of the mind, that are conversant about them, calling the operations of the first *wisdom*, and of the other *wit*, which is a Saxon word, used to express what the Spaniards and Italians call *ingenio*, and the French *esprit*, both from the Latin; though I think wit more particularly signifies that of poetry, as may occur in remarks on the Runic language."

Nothing can possibly be more confused than this sentence, which, to be rendered intelligible, requires to be divided into at least two or three. We have another in Lord Shaftsbury's rhapsody, where he treats of the sun's influence, monstrous animals, and then of man, all in one period.

"The sun," says he, "breaks the icy fetters of the main, when vast sea-monsters pierce through floating islands, with arms that can withstand the crystal rocks; whilst others, that of themselves seem great as islands,

are by their bulk alone armed against all but man, whose superiority over creatures of such stupendous size and force, should make him mindful of his privilege of reason, and force him humbly to adore that great Composer of these wondrous frames, and the author of his own superior wisdom."

From these, and other examples, which will frequently occur in the course of your reading, you will find that the complaint against *long* sentences arises not so much from their length, as from their perplexity; from their implicating too many circumstances to admit of their being clearly comprehended by the mind at one view. This is often not the mere fault of dulness, which naturally obscures every thing, but it may arise from the exuberance of genius, which is apt to comprise, at a single glance, a vast variety of matter, and to imagine that what is easily understood by itself must be equally so by others.

A very little consideration will shew you that the whole of the obscurity in the first sentence which I have quoted from Sir William Temple may be removed, and with scarcely any multiplication of words, by merely breaking it into three; for instance:

"The usual acceptation takes profit and pleasure for two different things, and calls their respective votaries by the distinct names of the busy and the idle. A similar distinction prevails even with respect to the faculties of the mind which are conversant about these different objects, and the operations of the one are called wisdom, those of the other wit. This last word is of Saxon origin, and is used to express what the Spaniards and Italians call *ingenio*, and the French *esprit*, both from the Latin; though I am of opinion that wit is more immediately applicable to poetry," &c.

There is another sentence quoted by Dr. Blair from Swift's "Proposal for correcting the English Language," which is almost equally obscure, and which might be rectified with equal facility. After noticing the state of our language under Cromwell, he adds: "To this succeeded that licentiousness which entered with

the Restoration, and from infecting our religion and morals, fell to corrupting our language; which last was not like to be much improved by those who at that time made up the court of King Charles II.; either such as had followed him in his banishment, or who had been altogether conversant in the dialect of these fanatic times; or young men who had been educated in the same country; so that the court, which used to be the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, and I think has ever since continued the worst school in England for that accomplishment; and so will remain, till better care be taken of the education of our nobility, that they may set out into the world with some foundation of literature, in order to qualify them for patterns of politeness."

I should perhaps propose some more extensive alterations in this sentence was I to survey it throughout with a critical eye; but the obscurity, as well as the tediousness of a long period, will be removed even by so simple an alteration as the following:

"To this succeeded that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and in consequence of which, not merely our religion and morals, but even our language, was corrupted. Our language indeed was not likely to be improved by those who formed the court of Charles II. That court consisted either of such as had followed him into banishment, or had been altogether conversant in the dialect of those fanatic times; or else of young men who had been educated in the same country with himself. Thus the court, which before had been the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then; and I think has ever since continued, the worst school in England for that accomplishment. Such indeed I fear it will remain, till better care is taken of the education of our nobility, in order that they may enter upon life with some foundation of literature, to qualify them to appear as patterns of politeness."

The 2d rule that I propose, is to be careful of the too frequent or indiscreet use of parentheses. They should always arise out of the subject, and yet be so far uncon-

nected with it, that the sense inclosed within the brackets shall be complete in itself, and such as might be spared without destroying the sense of the period. A parenthesis should also be short, and not consist of many members; otherwise it will become inevitably blended with the main sense, or the latter will be even forgotten by the reader.

I have said parentheses should not be too frequent: yet in oratorical, or animated composition, they have sometimes both force and beauty. Mr. Gibbon was a great master in the use of them.....Two casually occur to my mind, and therefore are not to be regarded as his best: "The nobles were taught to seek a sure and independent revenue from their estates, instead of adorning their splendid beggary by the oppression of the people, or (what is much the same) by the favour of the court."

"The Christians and the Moslems enumerate (and perhaps multiply) the illustrious victims that were sacrificed to the zeal, avarice, or resentment of the old man (as he was corruptly styled) of the mountain."

3dly. When it is practicable, let the sentence close with the principal and emphatical words. The genius of the English language admits of very small transposition, and therefore we are more confined in this respect than the Greeks or Romans. Quinctilian recommends that the principal word should be placed near the end of a sentence; and the ancients generally ended their periods with a verb.

In English we cannot observe the same rule. We ought, however, to place important words where they appear to most advantage: and the most proper place seems to be the beginning or end of a sentence. Of the proper disposition of the principal words, we have a fine example from Lord Shaftsbury, comparing the modern poets with the ancients:

"And if whilst they profess only to *please*, they secretly *advise* and give instruction, they may now perhaps, as well as formerly, be esteemed with justice the best and most honourable among authors."

By putting the sentence in a different order, we shall be easily convinced how much beauty is lost by bad arrangement.

"And if whilst they profess to *please only*, they advise secretly and give instruction, they may justly be esteemed the best and most honourable among authors now, perhaps as well as formerly."

Here the adverbs *only* and *secretly*, being put after the verbs, and the sentence ending with a particle, makes the whole period disagreeable, but they are disposed by the author where they scarcely can be observed. We are to remember, however, that particles may conclude a sentence when they are words of importance, as in this sentence of Lord Bolingbroke concerning his friends:

"In their prosperity they shall *never* hear of me, in their adversity *always*."

Agreeably to this rule we ought to avoid such words at the end of our sentences as only mark the cases of nouns, e. g.

"Avarice is a crime which wise men are often guilty of."

And a certain author speaking of the Trinity, says,

"This is a mystery, which we firmly believe the truth of, and humbly adore the depth of."

The fault and the correction of it are both obvious; it ought to have been expressed thus:

"This is a mystery, the truth of which we firmly believe, and the depth of which we humbly adore."

Compound verbs should seldom be used at the end of sentences; and the pronoun *it* is generally a very improper close.

4thly. We should endeavour to contrive that the members of our sentences shall rise upon one another, and beware of making the last sentence the echo of the former.

This kind of arrangement is called a climax, when, as we proceed, every member seems to grow in importance. Cicero particularly studied this grace of compo-

sition; and there is a fine example of it in his oration for Milo:

"Si res, si vir, si tempus ullum dignum fuit, certe, hæc in illa causa, summa omnia fuerunt."

We have another example in Lord Bolingbroke's idea of a Patriot King:

"This decency, this grace, this propriety of manners and character is so essential to princes in particular, that whenever it is neglected, their virtues lose a great degree of lustre, and their defects acquire much aggravation. Nay more; by neglecting this decency and this grace, and for want of a sufficient regard to appearances, even their virtues may betray them into failings, their failings into vices, and their vices into habits unworthy of princes, and unworthy of men."

The finest instance of climax extant is, however, that of St. Paul, 2 Cor. xi. 22, &c.

"Are they Hebrews? so am I; are they Israelites? so am I; are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they the ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft."

The instance mentioned of Crassus by Cicero in his treatise "De Oratore," is also worth your attention. In examining a witness who appeared against his client.... "Perhaps, said the orator, the person spoke these words only in a passion?" The witness not making any reply, he proceeded...."Perhaps you did not rightly understand him?" The witness continuing silent, he adds...."Perhaps you did not hear it at all?"

From all that has been said you will be prepared for my 5th and last observation, which is, that the most ungraceful circumstance in composition is what I may call a kind of appendix to a sentence: something added after the natural close, and which is frequently even of a very trivial nature, or which might have been included in the body of the sentence. Dr. Blair very properly terms such sentences "more than finished," and as I have his work before me, and no better instances occur, I shall give you the two that he has quoted. In the first

of these the words succeeding the natural close, which is "indignation," might have been omitted; and in the second, you will see the appended words are better included in the body of the sentence.

Sir William Temple, speaking of Burnet's Theory of the Earth, and Fontenelle's Plurality of Worlds, observes:

"The first could not end his learned treatise without a panegyric of modern learning in comparison of the ancient; and the other falls so grossly into the censure of the old poetry, and preference of the new, that I could not read either of these strains without some indignation; which no quality among men is so apt to raise in me as self sufficiency."

The other instance is from Swift's Letter to a Young Clergyman:

"With these writings young divines are more conversant than with those of Demosthenes, who by many degrees excelled the other; at least as an orator.

The proper correction of this sentence need scarcely be pointed out:

"With these writings young divines are more conversant than with those of Demostheness, who, at least as an orator, by many degrees excelled the other."

Much has been said by critical writers, but to little purpose, on the subject of long and short sentences. I have already explained why what are called long sentences are usually faulty: it is because they are perplexed by involving the matter of two or three, and this is generally the case with Clarendon's "Periods of a Mile," as they are well entitled by a judicious modern poet. Sometimes they have an appendix attached to them, and in old writers frequently conclude with a *by*, a *with*, an *of*, or some other insignificant word; otherwise where a sentence is clear, and strong, and well compacted, it is never the worse for being long, if kept within the bounds of moderation. Mr. Burke, who was a model of every grace and excellence of composition, was remarkable for the length of his periods; but they were at the same time full and sonorous.

If it were asked, however, to what species of composition long or short sentences are most adapted, I would say that long sentences are the language of oratory, short sentences of conversation. Grave and studied composition best accords with a length of period, and some degree of inversion of language is then an excellence, since it serves to dignify and raise it above the level of colloquial discourse. For the gay and familiar, short sentences are best adapted; as such composition is commonly an imitation of common conversation. On this account Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws is a most ill-written book. The number of short sentences tires excessively; and they succeed each other so rapidly, as not to leave impressions sufficiently strong and distinct.

Composition purely didactic, however, in which there is no appeal to the passions, ought not to abound in very long sentences, nor should there be much departure from the natural order of the words. I would almost prescribe the same rule for narrative, especially where there is no description. Where, however, description is introduced, there is room for a display of eloquence, and then the composition may assume something of a rhetorical cast. For reasons which I shall afterwards assign, I think Mr. Hume's history very faulty; but I cannot deny him the praise of a clear and unaffected style, which renders his narrative generally intelligible and pleasant. Mr. Gibbon, on the contrary, has more eloquence, and he describes better than he narrates.

After all that I have urged on this topic, you will derive more of practical improvement from the careful perusal of good authors, than from any rules that can be laid down. Take Pope, Addison, Burke, Robertson, Johnson, (particularly the preface to his dictionary) and Gibbon; and observe carefully how each of these great writers has arranged his words, and constructed his periods. You will find something characteristic in each with respect to the harmony of their numbers, and the structure of their sentences; but though I advise you to study them all, I do not recommend a servile imita-

tion of any. If I was to propose a model for general use, it would be the style of Mr. Addison; for in copying that, you are copying the expression of nature itself. He is sufficiently pure though not faultless. He is always perspicuous, natural and easy. In harmony he has never been excelled; and his periods are constructed with the art, dexterity and promptitude of a master workman. They are never deficient in grace, though it must be allowed that sometimes they want strength, but that was not an object considering the nature of his subjects. On this account Mr. Addison shewed his judgment in not attempting the part of an orator in parliament. His style was not adapted to it. In fine, to use the words of an incomparable critic and biographer:— "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison."

LETTER IX.

ORNAMENT.....AMPLIFICATION.

MY DEAR JOHN,

THE real ornaments of composition, whether prose or poetry, can proceed only from genius, from a mind rich in such ideas as are the fruits of observation, active in forming combinations, and nice in selecting such as are interesting and beautiful, and adapted to the subject. This observation will naturally recal to your memory what I have advanced in my second letter, that it is the clear and striking display of a number of circumstances which are calculated to exhibit a picture strongly to the mind, that renders a style interesting and animated. Compare the description of the storm in Virgil's first Æneid, that of Milton's Death and Sin, or the account of a battle by a Livy or a Gibbon, with the narratives or descriptions of ordinary writers, and you will soon perceive the magic touch of genius.

An historian, or even a poet, might have expressed or described the surprise of the northern invaders at finding themselves transported from a bleak and unfriendly region, to the genial climate of Italy, and yet not raise the emotions which Mr. Gray excites even in a few lines.....

> "With grim delight the brood of winter view,
> "A brighter day, and skies of azure hue;
> "Scent the new fragrance of the breathing rose,
> "And quaff the pendant vintage as it grows."

Here even every epithet speaks something to the purpose: the "*grim* delight," the "brood of *winter*," the *brightness* of the day, and the "skies of azure hue," the rose and the grape, so beautifully introduced, are

all picturesque, and have a finer effect than a formal description.

Again Shakspeare might have moralized, as many a popular preacher does, upon the progress of human life from infancy to manhood, and its subsequent decline and melancholy termination. He might have compared it to a drama, remarked on the variety of characters which we are called upon by Providence to assume; and he might have concluded, like the gentleman to whom I have alluded, with some good common-place remark, as "he is a happy man, who plays well the part which is assigned him." But this would not attract and engage the reader like the picture which he draws of the different and almost contrasted characters in which the same man may be appointed to appear....

"All the world's a stage,
"And all the men and women merely players;
"They have their exits, and their entrances;
"And one man in his time plays many parts,
"His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
"Mewling and puking, in the nurse's arms:
"And then, the whining school-boy, with his satchel,
"And shining morning face, creeping like snail
"Unwillingly to school: and then, the lover;
"Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
"Made to his mistress' eye-brow: then, a soldier;
"Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
"Zealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
"Seeking the bubble reputation
"Even in the cannon's mouth: and then, the justice;
"In fair round belly, with good capon lin'd,
"With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
"Full of wise saws and modern instances,
"And so he plays his part: the sixth age shifts
"Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon;
"With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side;
"His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide
"For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
"Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
"And whistles in his sound: Last scene of all,
"That ends this strange eventful history,
"Is second childishness, and mere oblivion;
"Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing."

I select this *well-known* passage, because from its being familiar to you, it will more strongly impress upon your mind the doctrine I wish to enforce.

I had read many accounts of the first crusades, but I never *saw* them, till depicted by the animating pencil of Gibbon.

"The 15th of August had been fixed in the council of Clermont for the departure of the pilgrims: but the day was anticipated by the thoughtless and needy crowd of plebeians; and I shall briefly dispatch the calamities which they inflicted and suffered, before I enter on the more serious and successful enterprise of the chiefs. Early in the spring, from the confines of France and Lorraine, above sixty thousand of the populace of both sexes flocked round the first missionary of the crusade, and pressed him with clamorous importunity to lead them to the holy sepulchre. The hermit, assuming the character, without the talents or authority, of a general, impelled or obeyed the forward impulse of his votaries along the banks of the Rhine and Danube. Their wants and numbers soon compelled them to separate, and his lieutenant, Walter the Pennyless, a valiant, though needy soldier, conducted a vanguard of pilgrims, whose condition may be determined from the proportion of eight horsemen to fifteen thousand foot. The example and footsteps of Peter were closely pursued by another fanatic, the monk of Godescal, whose summons had swept away fifteen or twenty thousand peasants from the villages of Germany. Their rear was again pressed by an herd of two hundred thousand, the most stupid and savage refuse of the people, who mingled with their devotion a brutal licence of rapine, prostitution, and drunkenness. Some counts, and gentlemen, at the head of three thousand horse, attended the motions of the multitude to partake in the spoil; but their genuine leaders (may we credit such folly?) were a goose and a goat, who were carried in the front, and to whom these worthy Christians ascribed an infusion of the divine spirit."

Though brevity is a characteristic of the sacred writers, yet they are no strangers to that kind of amplification which gives an energy and an interest to their observations. Languor and feebleness are the characteristics of old age, but how beautifully is this expressed in the following passage:

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them.

"While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders (rather millers or men that grind) cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

From the first paragraph that I have quoted, the style is highly figurative, expressive of the failure of the senses, and of the animal powers. The decay of sight is expressed by the light of the sun and the moon and the stars (all amplification) being darkened. The loss of strength by the "keepers of the house (the hands and arms I believe) trembling;" and the "strong men, (the limbs) bowing themselves." "The millers, or men that grind, ceasing because they are few," evidently alludes to the loss of the teeth; and the failure of the sight is again described under the figure of "those who look out at the windows being darkened."

I cannot say that I understand the meaning of the phrase "the almond tree shall flourish;" but the expression "the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and de-

sire shall fail," is inexpressibly beautiful, and the finest description, in few words, that I ever saw of the extreme debility and helplessness of old age. The concluding expression is so striking that it has become proverbial, "because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

In poetry there is more exercise for the imagination, and consequently more opportunity for this kind of amplification than in any prose composition whatever. The poems of Goldsmith, which, being of the descriptive kind, afford the most ample scope, are almost entirely composed of it. Take as an example, the charming character of the village preacher from the Deserted Village.....

"Near yonder copse, where once the garden smil'd,
"And still where many a garden flower grows wild,
"There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
"The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
"A man he was to all the country dear,
"And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
"Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
"Nor e'er had chang'd, nor wish'd to change his place;
"Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for pow'r,
"By doctrines fashion'd to the varying hour;
"Far other aims his heart had learn'd to prize,
"More bent to raise the wretched than to rise.
"His house was known to all the vagrant train,
"He chid their wand'rings, but reliev'd their pain;
"The long remember'd beggar was his guest,
"Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;
"The ruin'd spendthrift, now no longer proud,
"Claim'd kindred there, and had his claims allow'd;
"The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,
"Sat by his fire, and talk'd the night away;
"Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
"Shoulder'd his crutch, and shew'd how fields were won.
"Pleas'd with his guests, the good man learn'd to glow,
"And quite forgot their vices in their woe;
"Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
"His pity gave ere charity began."

I cannot resist the temptation of adding the portrait of the schoolmaster.....

" Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,
" With blossom'd furze, unprofitably gay,
" There in his noisy mansion, skill'd to rule,
" The village master taught his little school:
" A man severe he was, and stern to view,
" I knew him well, and every truant knew;
" Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace
" The day's disasters in his morning face;
" Full well they laugh'd, with counterfeited glee,
" At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;
" Full well the busy whisper, circling round,
" Convey'd the dismal tidings when he frown'd;
" Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
" The love he bore to learning was his fault;
" The village all declar'd how much he knew;
" 'Twas certain he could write and cypher too.
" Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
" And ev'n the story ran that he could gauge:
" In arguing too, the parson own'd his skill,
" For ev'n though vanquish'd he could argue still;
" While words of learned length, and thund'ring sound,
" Amaz'd the gazing rustics rang'd around;
" And still they gaz'd, and still the wonder grew
" That one small head should carry all he knew."

You will easily see that these two characters might have been delineated in few words; but the enumeration and display of all the little circumstances that serve to mark them, renders the picture striking and perfect.

But though poetry affords the finest field for this exercise of the fancy, so convinced were the ancients of its necessity to fine composition, that they proposed certain *topics* or common places to assist the memory in bringing forward every thing that served to illustrate a subject. Aristotle's Rhetoric, which I would have you read as the curious effort of the most methodical understanding that ever existed, is chiefly a collection of these topics. The *topics*, or common places, they distributed into two kinds; general or metaphysical topics; or particular topics. Of the first kind were happiness, virtue, the profitable, the good, &c. &c.; particular *topics* regarded men, places, or times.

Thus under the general topic or division *happiness*, they would enumerate health, security, power, nobility, friends, children, fame, success, disposition, wealth, &c.

Under the particular topic *person*, they would have regard to sex, age, fortune, education, ability, family, offices, &c.

Thus in descanting upon the excellence and utility of any virtue, and to shew how it contributed to happiness, by turning to that general topic, the orator or the student would be led to argue how far it was essential to health, to security, to fame, &c.

Or in delineating a character, by glancing his eye on his common-place book, he would be led to declare what the person was as to birth, fortune, education, ability, offices, connexions, &c.

This method is however too mechanical to be pursued by a person of genius, and none but a person of genius will ever succeed in amplification on any subject. Yet I think I may recommend to you, when you are to write on any subject, to sit down previously and consider it in all its parts, circumstances and relations, and even to take notes of those topics on which it may be proper to enlarge. In short, though amplification may not be necessary to plain didactic or narrative composition, it may be fairly inferred that almost all the beauties of fine writing will proceed more or less from a judicious application of this principle.

I must repeat, however, that it depends entirely on the taste and judgment of the author to select such circumstances as are really striking, for nothing can be more stupid than an amplified detail of trifling matters. It would be a very instructive exercise, if a *judicious* tutor in rhetoric, was to give occasionally his pupils, as themes on which to enlarge, some general heads; as some well-known character in history, the imaginary description of a landscape, a battle, a garden, &c. Or you may do the same for yourself, taking a subject from Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon; writing your own thoughts upon it, and afterwards comparing your effort with that of the author. M. Rollin produces some of

these subjects to which I shall refer, in order to enable you to pursue with more effect this excellent exercise of the youthful mind.

"The theme is to display the religion and piety of marshal Turenne, even in the midst of battles and victories.

"The writer must begin with a common-place, to represent how difficult it is for a general, at the head of a great army, neither to be elate with pride, nor to consider himself infinitely superior to the rest of mankind. Even the aspect of the war, the noise of arms, the cries of soldiers, &c. conspire to make him forget what he himself and what God is. It was on such occasions, Salmoneus, Antiochus, and Pharaoh, had the presumption and impiety to think themselves gods; but it must be confessed that religion and humility never appear more illustrious, than when they render a man submissive and obedient to God in such high fortunes.

"It was on such occasions that M. Turenne gave the greatest proofs of his piety: he was often seen to withdraw into woods, and, in the midst of the rain and dirt, prostrate himself before God. He ordered prayers to be said in the camp every day, at which he assisted in person with singular devotion.

"Even in the heat of battle, when success appeared infallible, and news was brought him of it from all quarters, he used to suppress the joy of the officers, by saying; 'If God does not support us, and finish his own work, we may still be defeated.'"

This subject, as treated by M. Mascaron, in the funeral oration of M. Turenne.

"Do not imagine that our hero lost those religious sentiments at the head of armies, and in the midst of victories. Certainly, if there is any conjuncture in which the soul, full of itself, is in danger of forgetting God, it is in those illustrious stations where a man becomes as a god to others, by the wisdom of his conduct, the greatness of his courage, the strength of his arm, and

the number of his soldiers; and, being wholly inspired with glory, inspires all besides with love, admiration, or terror. Even the externals of war, the sound of trumpets, the glitter of arms, the order of the troops, the silence of the soldiers, their ardor in fight; the beginning, progress, and end of the victory; the different cries of the conquered and the conquerors; all these assail the soul on different sides, which, deprived of all wisdom and moderation, knows neither God, nor itself. It is then the impious Salmoneus presumes to imitate the thunder of God, and to answer the thunderbolts of Heaven with those of the earth. It was then the sacrilegious Antiochus worshipped nothing but his own strength and courage; and the insolent Pharaoh, swoln with the pride of his power, cried out, I am my own maker. But do religion and humility ever appear more majestic, than when they keep the heart of man, though in so exalted a point of glory, in that submission and dependence which the creature ought to observe with regard to his God?

"M. Turenne was never more sensible that there was a God, than on those extraordinary occasions, when others generally forget their Creator. It was then his prayers were most fervent. We have seen him retiring into woods, where, in the midst of rain, with his knees in the dirt, he adored that God in this humble posture, before whom legions of angels tremble, and prostrate themselves. The Israelites, to secure themselves of victory, ordered the ark of the covenant to be brought into their camp: and M. Turenne did not believe his could be safe, if not fortified daily by the oblation of the divine victim, who triumphed over all the powers of hell. He assisted at it with a devotion and modesty capable of inspiring awe in those obdurate souls, on whom the sight of the most tremendous mysteries makes no impression.

"Even in the progress of victory itself, and in those moments of self-love, when a general sees fortune declare in his favour, his piety was watchful to prevent his giving the jealous God the least offence, by too hasty an assurance of conquering. Though the cries of

victory echoed round him; though the officers flattered themselves and him also with assurance of success; he still checked all the extreme emotions of joy, in which human pride has so great a share, by these words, highly worthy of his piety: *If God does not support us, and accomplish his work, we may still be defeated.*"....ROLLIN.

The modesty of M. Turenne.....His private life.

"No person ever spoke more modestly of himself than M. Turenne. He related his most surprising victories, as if he had no share in them. At his return from the most glorious campaigns, he avoided praise, and was afraid of appearing in the king's presence, for fear of applause. It was then, in a private state, among a few friends, he exercised himself in the virtues of civil life. He conceals himself, and walks without attendance or equipage: but every one observes and admires him."

This theme extended by Flechier.

"Who ever performed such great exploits, and who more reserved in speaking of them? When he gained an advantage, he himself ascribed it to the enemy's oversight, and not to his own abilities. When he gave an account of a battle, he forgot nothing, but its being gained by his own conduct. If he related any of those actions which had rendered him so famous, one would have concluded he had only been a spectator, and might doubt whether he himself or fame was mistaken. When he returned from those glorious campaigns, which immortalize him, he avoided all acclamations of the people; he blushed at his victories; he received applauses with the same air that others make apologies, and was almost afraid of waiting upon the king, being obliged, through respect, to hear patiently the encomiums with which his Majesty never failed to honour him.

"It was then, in the calm repose of a private state, that this prince, divesting himself of all the glory he had acquired in the field, and shutting himself up with a

small company of chosen friends, practised in silence the virtues of civil life: sincere in his words, plain in his actions, faithful in friendship, exact in duties, regular in his wishes, and great even in the minutest things. He concealed himself; but his fame discovers him. He walks without attendance; but every one images him riding in a triumphal chariot. When people see him, they count the number of the enemies he has conquered, and not the attendants that follow him. Though alone, they conceive him surrounded with his attendant virtues and victories. There is something inexpressibly great and noble in this virtuous simplicity; and the less haughty he is, the more venerable he appears."..... ROLLIN.

The Queen of England's escape by sea.

" The queen was obliged to leave her kingdom. She sailed out of the English ports in sight of the rebel fleet, which pursued her close. This voyage was far different from that she had made on the same sea, when she went to take possession of the sceptre of Great Britain. At that time every thing was propitious; now all the reverse."

" *The queen was obliged to leave her kingdom. And indeed she sailed out of the English ports in sight of the rebellious navy, which chased her so close, that she almost heard their cries and insolent threats. Alas! how different was this voyage from that she made on the same sea, when, coming to take possession of the sceptre of Great Britain, she saw the billows smooth themselves, as it were, under her, to pay homage to the queen of the seas! Now chased, pursued, by her implacable enemies; who had been so audacious as to draw up an accusation against her: sometimes just escaped, sometimes just taken; her fortune shifting every quarter of an hour, having no other assistance but

* The Queen of England's funeral oration, by M. Bossuet.

God, and her own invincible fortitude, she had neither winds nor sails enough to favour her precipitate flight." .....ROLLIN.

Perhaps the following instance from Mr. Burke will be still more pleasing, and I am sure it is more eloquent than those I have just quoted. You will observe that he might have said the whole in few words ....that Mr. Howard evinced his philanthropy in foregoing every comfort, and despising every danger, for the sake of relieving the distresses of his fellow creatures.....

"I cannot name this gentleman without remarking, that his labours and writings have done much to open the eyes and hearts of mankind. He has visited all Europe.....not to survey the sumptuousness of palaces, or the stateliness of temples; not to make accurate measurements of the remains of ancient grandeur; nor to form a scale of the curiosity of modern art; nor to collect medals, or collate manuscripts: but to dive into the depth of dungeons; to plunge into the infection of hospitals; to survey the mansions of sorrow and pain; to take the gauge and dimensions of misery, depression, and contempt; to remember the forgotten, to attend to the neglected, to visit the forsaken, and to compare and collate the distresses of all men in all countries. His plan is original; and it is as full of genius as it is of humanity. It was a voyage of discovery; a circumnavigation of charity. Already the benefit of his labour is felt more or less in every country: I hope he anticipates his final reward, by seeing all its effects fully realized in his own. He will receive, not by retail but in gross, the reward of those who visit the prisoner; and he has so forestalled and monopolized this branch of charity, that there will be, I trust, little room to merit by such acts of benevolence hereafter."....ADDRESS TO THE ELECTORS OF BRISTOL.

The beauty of this last quotation depends not entirely on the lively detail of circumstances connected with the subject, but on allusions to matters really foreign to it; and of these I shall treat in my succeeding letter.

LETTER X.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.....COMPARISONS AND SIMILIES.

MY DEAR JOHN,

A VIVID imagination is not satisfied with bringing before the reader's mind all the circumstances immediately connected with the principal subject, and placing them in a striking point of view; it borrows colours and forms from other objects to diversify and adorn the picture it draws....

" The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
" Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n;
" And, as imagination bodies forth
" The forms of things unknown, the *poet's* pen
" Turns them to shape," &c.

You will easily perceive that I am now going to speak of figurative language. It is called figurative, because the author's meaning is expressed, not by the strict and proper phrases, but under the image or appearance of something else. Thus figurative language, if taken according to the literal sense of the words, would usually mislead.

It is extraordinary, however, that what appears a deviation from nature or reason should be so extremely common, that scarcely a sentence occurs without some word in it used in a figurative sense. Indeed if you will read with attention Mr. Tooke's "Epea Pteroenta," (a work which every one ought to read) you will find that our most common particles are words distorted from their natural and primitve meaning. Dr. Blair used to remark on this subject, that at the moment he was

speaking on a didactic subject, he was addressing his audience in figurative language.

The origin of figures has been referred to the poverty of language; but I rather consider them either the sport of the fancy, or as the expression of passion or enthusiasm. We see imagery, and especially from natural objects, employed by the rudest and most savage nations, not from necessity, but from choice. The specimens which we have had translated of Indian eloquence are abundantly figurative, and no writings can be more conspicuous in this respect than the early productions of the Arabians. The writings of the Hebrews proceed from a higher source than mere human invention, yet we may easily conceive them, in style and manner, adapted to the circumstances of the age and the taste of the people. They are highly figurative, and that most accurate critic, Bishop Lowth, in his incomparable "Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews," has shewn that their imagery was all derived from those objects with which, from the time and situation of the country and nation, they were most familiar.

This branch of ornament is much more easily reduced to rule and methodical arrangement than that of which I have just been treating. But though it is easy to class the different forms of figurative language, still treatises on rhetoric will afford you as little substantial aid in this instance as in the former; for however reluctant the professor in this art may be, to own a truth destructive of his very profession, still he must confess with Butler:

> "That all a rhetorician's rules
> "Teach nothing but to name his tools."

It is genius alone that can enable you to use them; and it is a mind copiously stored with knowledge that can furnish the materials. The only essential service that can be rendered to a young writer in this way, is to caution him against the indiscreet and indiscriminate use of this species of ornament: for though its effect,

ne in impassioned composition, and under the direc-
on of a good taste, nothing can be more vapid, cold,
nd disgusting than a style overcharged with common-
lace metaphors and comparisons.

Figurative language, it is obvious, must depend upon he principle of association, and of the three relations ause and effect, contiguity, and resemblance; the lat-ter is the most fertile in the production of tropes and figures. That fancy which is most excursive, and which is the best stored with various knowledge, will be the most active in forming the combinations essential to figurative language. The various knowledge which extended to the detail of almost every subject in nature, and in art, is most conspicuous in Shakspeare, and in Butler; and among the moderns none have excelled Mr. Burke in the boldness and variety of his imagery.

I shall not perplex you with the distinction between tropes and figures; but since I have casually mentioned them, and since the words will often occur in conversation, I shall observe that in truth, each of these words is but a partial mode of expressing the same thing. A *trope*, τροπος in Greek, signifies no more than the *turning* of a word from its original meaning. *Figure*, as I before observed, is when an idea is expressed under the appearance of something else. The ancient critics classed as *tropes* the metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony; the figures were almost innumerable.

Leaving them to Farnaby, and his brethren, the many useless distinctions which the Greeks have made as to what are called figures, I shall proceed to treat of those forms of expression, in the order which is suggested by the three relations of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect.

From the relation of resemblance proceed the comparison or simile, the metaphor, the allegory, and the allusion; on the other relations depend the metonymy, the synecdoche, the periphrasis, the prosopopeia, and probably the apostrophe.

The comparison appears to be the first and most natural of all the rhetorical figures. When at a loss to explain our meaning, we are disposed always to apply the associating principle to furnish an illustration. In this way, a comparison may occur in the simplest and plainest composition, even in a lecture on experimental philosophy.

But I wish rather to treat of them here as a source of ornament, and when judiciously applied there is scarcely any ornament more pleasing. I must observe, however, that the mind of the author must be supposed to be in a cool state, when it descends to this sport of the imagination. Similies are not the natural language of passion; they will apply in description, in narrative, but will not serve to express the vehement emotions of the mind; since then, if the imagination is disposed to be excursive, it will naturally drop the words expressing the resemblance, and snatching the image forcibly at once express itself in metaphor.

Hence you will perceive that the difference between a simile and a metaphor is, that in the former the resemblance is brought before the reader's view by comparing the ideas together, and by words expressing a likeness; a metaphor is a comparison without the words expressing resemblance. I may add, that a distinction might be established between the words *comparison* and *simile*. The former is the general word comprehending the whole class, or when used in a limited sense, is more immediately appropriated to the most perfect of the kind; *that* in which the resemblance is minutely traced through all the agreeing parts of the objects assimilated. The word simile seems chiefly appropriated to poetry; and I think implies a slighter and more fanciful resemblance.

The Hebrew writings are unquestionably the oldest that have been transmitted to us: their imagery is almost exclusively derived from natural objects; this imparts to them a simplicity which can be attributed to no other writings. Some of their comparisons are how-

ever remarkably bold, and some incomparably beautiful, as you will see by consulting a work, which contributed beyond any other to the improvement of my taste, Bishop Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews.

One imperfection, however, I have to remark in the similies of the Hebrews, and of the Orientals in general, that the resemblance is often too fanciful and remote. Of this I shall produce an instance from the book of Job, c. vi. v. 15.....20.

"My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away: which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid. What time they were warm they vanish: when it is hot they consume out of their place. The paths of their way are turned aside: they go to nothing and perish. The troops of Tema looked, the companions of Sheba waited for them. They were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither and were ashamed."

The 133d Psalm consists of one of these fanciful similies, but it is extremely beautiful. It is somewhat amplified by Buchanan, and in translating it I made use of a part of his imagery.

Sweet is the love that mutual glows
  Within each brother's breast;
And binds in gentlest bonds each heart,
  All blessing, and all blest.

Sweet as the odorous balsam pour'd
  On Aaron's sacred head,
Which o'er his beard, and down his vest,
  A breathing fragrance shed.

Like morning dews on Sion's mount,
  That spread their silver rays;
And deck with gems the verdant pomp
  That Hermon's top displays.

Another particular may also be remarked, which is, that the Hebrew similies are frequently very short. The resemblance usually turns upon a single circumstance,

which they explain in few words, and seldom introduce any matter at all foreign to the purpose.

The classical writers are more sparing of their similies, and they introduce them with greater pomp and form. There is however a disgusting sameness in those of the ancient epic poets. In their descriptions of battles, for instance, the imagery of a lion, a bull, an eagle, and others of the fiercer animals so commonly occurs, that I am frequently more disposed to pass over their similies than to stop and admire them.

The modern writers are possessed of considerable advantages, in this respect, and to these they have not been inattentive. The more extensive views which they possess of sciences, and arts, and of the history of nature in particular, has opened to them a wider and more varied field in poetical imagery. They now decorate our gravest productions, and surprise by their novelty and fanciful application. A very beautiful comparison presents itself at this moment to my memory, from the elegant and lively sermons of Dr. Ogden. In one of his discourses against slander...."Censure," says the preacher, "is in season so very seldom, that it may be compared to that bitter plant, which hardly comes to its maturity in the life of a man, and is said to flower but once in a hundred years."

The following is fanciful, yet perhaps the transitory nature, as well as the splendour of traditional fame, is well imagined under this image....."Then let us be renowned while we may, and leave our fame behind us, like the last beams of the sun, when he hides his red head in the west."....OSSIAN.

From what I have observed, it will follow, that the author who possesses the greatest scope of knowledge, if he has an active and lively fancy, will have the greatest command of imagery, and will produce the boldest and most varied comparisons. Yet the metaphysical poets of Charles the Second's reign, as they are very properly termed by Dr. Johnson, were guilty of such abuses that they disgust us with the figurative style. Their imagery was not select, nor under the regulation

of good taste; without which even genius itself will be able to effect but little. Several rules have therefore been established with respect to the use of comparisons, which may serve to restrain the vicious exuberances of youthful genius.

1st. A comparison taken from a common or vulgar object, should have something particularly ingenious in it to render it tolerable. I shall not name the poet from whom the following distich is extracted, but you will be surprised to know that he is of a very high reputation.

> "The rage of jealousy then fir'd his soul,
> "And his face kindled *like a burning coal.*"

Such nonsense as the following is scarcely to be endured...."A good sermon, like a good peach, is indeed a *composition* of *rich* materials, which the maker has associated to bring it to its proper flavour, but which the eater may relish, and from which he may derive nourishment without being obliged to learn chemistry, or knowing how to decompound, and reduce the whole to its parts."...ROBINSON'S TRANSLATION OF CLAUDE'S ESSAY, C. 4. NOTE.

Even Dr. Campbell, who has written so well on the principles of rhetoric, is scarcely more fortunate...."A paraphrase," he observes, "is like a torpedo, for it benumbs the sense; and the gospel, by this means, becomes like a wine of a rich flavour, diluted in such a quantity of water as renders it extremely vapid." The same simile, by the way, he has repeated in another place.

You must however be aware that comparisons taken from low and mean objects are well adapted to the burlesque.

2dly. They ought not to be trite; such as comparing a violent passion to a tempest; virtue to the sun; one in distress to a flower drooping its head.

3dly. Comparisons or similies ought to be founded on a likeness neither too obvious nor too remote: if the likeness is too obvious it disgusts, if too remote it per-

plexes; in the one case the reader easily perceives it, and therefore conceives the writer to be a person of inferior genius; in the other case it savours of affectation and pedantry. Some of Milton's seem of too obvious a kind, where he compares Eve to a Dryad, and the bower of Paradise to the arbour of Pomona. For there appears no art or ingenuity in saying one arbour is like another, or that a woman resembles a wood nymph.

4thly. They should not be drawn from objects quite unknown, for these, instead of throwing light upon a subject, can only serve to render it more obscure.

5thly. From what I have observed before, neither this nor any other figure should be borrowed from metaphysical ideas. But for the incomparable exposure of this fault I refer you to Dr. Johnson's Life of the poet Cowley.

LETTER XI.

METAPHORS.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I OBSERVED in my last letter that a metaphor is a comparison, without the words indicating resemblance. When a savage experienced a sensation, for which he had as yet no name, he applied that of the idea which most resembled it, in order to explain himself. Thus the words expressing the faculties of the mind are taken from sensible images, as fancy from *phantasm:* idea in the original language means an image or picture; and a way has always been used to express the mode of attaining our end or desire.

There is, however, as I have already expressed, another reason for the use of metaphorical language, and which, in an advanced state of society, is the most common; that is, when the mind is agitated, the associations are more strongly felt, and the connected ideas will more readily present themselves than at another time. On this account a man in a passion will frequently reject the words which simply express his thoughts, and for the sake of giving them more force, will make use of images stronger, more lively, and more congenial to the tone of his mind.

The principal advantage which the metaphor possesses over the simile or comparison, seems to consist in the former transporting the mind, and carrying it nearer the reality than the latter; as when we say...."Achilles rushed like a lion," we have only the idea of *a man* going on furiously to battle; but when we say instead of Achilles...."The lion rushed, on," the image is more vivid. Thus also when Virgil calls the Scipios "the thunderbolts of war," the idea is more animated than if he had compared them to thunderbolts. There is also

more of brevity in a style that abounds in metaphors, than in a style which consists more of comparisons, and therefore it proves a better vehicle for the passionate or sublime.

The rule which good writers seem to have adopted respecting the distinct use of similies or metaphors is this: Where the resemblance is very strong and obvious, it may be expressed by a simple metaphor, and it will in general be expressed more forcibly; but where the resemblance is not so obvious, it requires to be more expanded, and then a comparison or simile will neither appear formal nor pompous.

There is another observation concerning the use of these figures, which is more common, though I do not think the reason of it is generally understood. Comparisons, as I had occasion to observe before, are unnatural in extremes of passion, though metaphors are not. The truth is, the mind, when strongly agitated, readily catches at slight associations, and metaphors therefore are instantaneously formed; but it is impossible that the imagination in that state should dwell upon them with the formality and exactness of a person making a comparison.

A metaphor is not always confined to a single word. It may extend to a whole sentence, though when much expanded, rhetoricians call it by another name, an ALLEGORY. It is not easy to say under which head we should rank the following bold and animated figure:

"The swarm of monks that arose from the Nile, overspread and darkened the face of the Christian world." .... GIBBON'S HIST. c. 20.

Some metaphors, and particularly those which consist of a single word, have become so common that they are scarcely to be considered as figurative. Thus when we speak of an *arm* of the sea, or of the *foot* of a mountain, we scarcely seem to speak figurative language; though these are in reality what may be called hard metaphors.

The principal uses of metaphors are,

1st. As was intimated in speaking of the advantages they possess over comparisons, they render a style more

animated, by introducing a new idea, in which for the moment the original seems to be lost or absorbed. In this way they serve even to enrich a language, and most languages without them would be exceedingly limited, at least in the application of words, which would produce necessarily great stiffness and formality.

2dly. They greatly vary and diversify a style, and consequently relieve us from that tedious uniformity which would be the result of a style where every word was used in the literal sense.

3dly. They serve to enlarge and elevate our subject; for we can borrow a metaphor from something which possesses the quality we mean to ascribe to it, in a higher or more extensive degree. Thus a huge dog, or even a man, described under the metaphor of an elephant, will appear to the imagination of the hearer as greater perhaps than the object really is. A "torrent of words," magnifies in imagination the loudness and rapidity of the speaker: though this metaphor, like some of those which I have mentioned, is now so common, that its force as a figure is greatly weakened. Sometimes even a metaphor or comparison taken from an inferior subject will have this effect, by impressing the circumstance more strongly on the mind, by means of a familiar idea. Thus, when in the book of Job, leviathan is described as "making the deep to boil like a pot," our notion of the magnitude and strength of the animal is not lessened, since we still carry in our minds the idea of the ocean, and apply the simile of the boiling cauldron only to the agitation occasioned by his motions.

4thly. For these reasons they bestow dignity on composition. How much nobler is it to say, "the vault of heaven," than to use the common word, "the *sky*." So we say, "the evening of life," for "old age." Thus the expression, "Death spares neither the rich nor the poor," is low, when compared with Horace:

"Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas
"Regumque turres."

" With equal pace impartial fate
" Knocks at the palace, as the cottage gate."

5thly. By metaphors, two objects are presented at the same time, without any confusion; as in the example already mentioned, we can, at the same time, have a clear and distinct view of the evening and of old age.

6thly. They often afford us a more clear and striking view of things; they place them in a picturesque manner before our eyes; so in that example we easily call to mind, that as noon succeeds to morning, and evening to noon, so youth is followed by manhood, and that by old age. The dark and silent evening too presents us with a striking picture of the gradual decline and deprivation of the faculties, both bodily and mental, " When the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and desire shall fail," &c.

Though however metaphors thus enliven and diversify composition, much taste is required in the employment of them. Young writers especially are too apt to be enamoured of them, and to use them in too great profusion, and with too little discrimination and selection. Nearly the same rules will apply to metaphors, as I have endeavoured to establish with respect to comparisons. I shall however subjoin a few further practical instructions.

The first rule then that I would lay down is not to be too profuse of them. By introducing too many metaphors into one sentence, we render it obscure, instead of more perspicuous. If they are too gay also, they probably may not suit the subject. Young authors are very apt to fall into this mistake; they commonly think that composition the best that is crowded with shining metaphors; but, as Dr. Blair justly remarks, we should remember that they are only the dress of the thoughts, and as the dress ought always to be suited to the station of the person who wears it, so language should be suited to the nature of the subject and the sentiment. We expect different language in argument and description;

in the first clearness only, in the other ornament also. When a man wears the dress of a person above his rank he is always accounted a *vain coxcomb;* so when mean sentiments are clothed in a pompous style, they only serve to make them more ridiculous. We have an example of this (quoted by the author to whom I have just referred) in Dr. Smollet's history, concerning the passing of a bill for preventing clandestine marriages. "At length it floated through both houses, on the tide of a great majority, and passed safe into the port of royal approbation."

2dly. They should not be taken from objects which are mean, disgusting, or vulgar. These inevitably debase a subject instead of exalting it. So Cicero blames some orators of his time for calling his fellow citizens "stercus curiæ." Tillotson is sometimes guilty of this fault when he speaks of "thrusting religion," "driving a strict bargain with God." And, speaking of the last judgment, he talks of the "heavens cracking *about our ears.*" See his sermon preached before Queen Ann, when Princess of Denmark. So Shakspeare alludes to a *dunghill,* in his Henry the Fifth, when describing the death of those who fell in France, fighting bravely in defence of their country. A similar one is introduced into one of the execrable versions of the Psalms, which have been "done" into English verse.

> "And Sis'ra which at Endor fell,
> "As *dung* to fat the ground."

Mr. Burke, though a writer of incomparable fancy, is very faulty in this respect.

3dly. Metaphors ought not to be "far fetched," as it is sometimes, though not elegantly, termed; in other words, they should be clear, easy, and natural. This circumstance has not escaped the notice of Cicero, in his book De Oratore, who says, they ought naturally to rise from the subject. In opposition to this, Cowley is always searching where he can find the most remote

connexion;* he frequently uses metaphors where the reader cannot trace the smallest resemblance; these darken the subject and bewilder by their perplexity, instead of throwing light on what was obscure. Thus when a common reader meets such a passage as this: "When the radical idea branches out into parallel ramifications, how can a consecutive series be formed of senses in their nature collateral," he knows not what to think; he pauses, and is perplexed, but not instructed. You will, perhaps, think I have selected this example to show what perplexed figures may be, or that it is taken from an author remarkably dull, neither of which is the case; you will find it in Dr. Johnson's preface to his Dictionary of the English Language. There is a metaphor equally harsh and obscure in Dr. Armstrong's Poem on Health, where he speaks of "tenacious paste of solid milk," which no ordinary reader would be likely to take for *a cheese!* Dr. Young is an author, many of whose metaphors are new, striking, and admirably conducted, and yet he is very often faulty in this respect. Mr. Addison, on the contrary, excels in his metaphors; they seem always to arise naturally and unsought, from the very series of thought in which the subject engages him. Thomson is on the whole a chaste writer, yet the metaphors in his Seasons are often forced, and what some have called unideal: such as, "Showery radiance, breezy coolness, moving softness, refreshing breaths, dewy light, lucid coolness," &c.

4thly. We should never confound the figurative and literal sense; as when Penelope, in the Odyssey, complains that her son had left her without taking leave.

> "Now from my fond embrace by tempests torn,
> "Our other column of the state is borne:
> "Nor took a kind adieu, nor sought consent," &c.

First Telemachus, in these lines, is made a column, and

* See Johnson's Life of Cowley.

that with propriety; but that column is blamed for not *bidding farewel* and *saluting*, which changes the column again into a person.

5thly. Metaphors should not be mixed or confounded together. Thus Shakspeare speaks of taking "*arms* against a *sea* of troubles," and of "*war snarling* at the very *picked bone* of majesty," "*charms dissolve* apace," &c. Mr. Addison himself has fallen into this mistake. In his letter from Italy he says,

> "I bridle in my struggling Muse in vain,
> "That longs to launch into a bolder strain."

Here the first line is proper enough; but when the Muse is changed from a horse to a ship, it becomes improper. It has, therefore, been given as a rule to be observed by orators, that they ought to figure to themselves the metaphors they employ as if painted before them, and observe whether any thing would appear improper or ridiculous, if the whole was drawn by the pencil of an artist.

6thly. They ought not to be crowded or heaped one upon another. Horace is guilty of this, in joining three metaphors in a few lines, lib. ii. ode 1.

> "Motum ex Metello consule civicum
> "Bellique causas, et vitia et modos,
> "Ludumque fortunæ, gravesque
> "Principum amicitias et arma
> "Nondum expiatis uncta cruoribus:
> "Periculosæ plenum opus aleæ
> "Tractas: et incedis per ignes
> "Suppositos cineri doloso."

> "Of warm contentions, wrathful jars,
> "The growing seeds of civil wars;
> "Of double fortune's cruel games,
> "The specious means, the private aims,
> "And fatal friendships of the guilty great,
> "Alas! how fatal to the Roman state.

> "Of mighty legions late subdu'd,
> "And arms with Latian blood embru'd;

"Yet unaton'd (a labour vast,
"Doubtful the dice, and dire the cast)
"You treat adventurous, and incautious tread
"On fires with faithless embers overspread."
Francis.

Under circumstances of great agitation, however, a flow of metaphors seems allowable, and even natural. No critic, I believe, ever found the following fine passage of Shakspeare too redundant in metaphor:

"Can'st thou not minister to a mind diseased?
"Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?
"Rase out the living tablets of the brain;
"And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
"Cleanse the foul bosom of that per'lous stuff,
"That weighs upon the heart." *Macbeth.*

7thly. They should not be too far pursued. Cowley is often faulty in this respect. Shaftesbury also frequently pursues his metaphors too far; he is so fond of embellishing his style with them, that when he has once found one to please him, he can never think of parting with it. This author, indeed, from his strained metaphors, and his inversion of language, is scarcely better understood than if he had written in Greek or Latin.

LETTER XII.

ALLEGORY.....ALLUSION.....CATACHRESIS.....ANTITHESIS.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I HAVE already intimated that an allegory is a metaphor protracted to some considerable length. "When several kindred metaphors," Cicero observes, "succeed one another, they alter the form of a composition; and on that account a succession of this kind is called by the Greeks an allegory; and properly, as far as relates to the etymology of the word. Aristotle, however, instead of considering it as a new species of figure, has more judiciously comprised such modes of expression under the general appellation of metaphors."

I confess I should myself be disposed to adopt the sentiment of Aristotle, and to appropriate the term allegory to another form of composition, which I shall have presently to mention. Custom and authority have, however, decreed it otherwise, and we must therefore admit of two kinds of allegory: the one, the continued metaphor; the other, the continued narration of a fictitious event, applied in the way of comparison to the illustration of the subject. These latter kind of allegories are called by the Greeks αἶνοι, or apologues; by the Latins fabulæ, or fables; and by the Hebrews *parables*, though the word parable is also applied to a proverbial speech or a pointed axiom. Such are the fables of Æsop and Pilpay, the Indian Sage; such is the charming parable which I had occasion to mention in my second letter, and the still more charming narratives of our Saviour, conveyed under the name of parables. Such, in later times, is the Fairy Queen of Spencer, which consists of a series of these allegories; and the very popular work

among the common people, "The Pilgrim's Progress" of Bunyan.

The first of these kinds of allegory differing only in length from the simple metaphor, there is but little necessity, after what I have observed on that subject in my last letter, to enter into the many particulars concerning its use or introduction. I must remark, however, that no figure is more delicate or difficult in the hands of a young writer. If the great difficulty in the use of a metaphor is to preserve the allusion in all its parts, how much must the difficulty be increased in applying a series of metaphors to illustrate the same subject? In short, there is scarcely any error so common as this of forgetting the figurative and resorting to the literal sense, even in the best writers. In the following passage of Shakspeare's King John, the figures are grossly discordant. It relates to the projected union of the King with Constance.....

> "For by this knot thou shalt so surely tie
> "Thy now unsured assurance to the crown,
> "That yon green boy shall have no sun to sip
> "The bloom that promises a mighty fruit."

It is evident that there is no connexion between the *tying* of a *knot* and the sun's *ripening fruit*; and to heighten the absurdity, the "bloom that promises a mighty fruit," is not on a *tree* but on a *boy*. Had the word *branch* been used instead of *boy*, this latter incongruity might have been avoided.

An allegorical couplet of Blackmore is for a similar reason well ridiculed by the authors of the art of scribbling in poetry.....

> "A waving sea of heads around them spread,
> "And still pert streams the *gazing* deluge fed."

A crowd of people is not improperly compared to a deluge, but when *eyes* are given to this metaphorical sea, the illusion is destroyed, and the effect is ridiculous.

The absurdity even of this is however exceeded by an allegorical sentence contained in a public instrument at a time when better writing might have been expected. "We cannot but acknowledge, to our very great sorrow and shame, that ourselves, though we hope through our weakness and frailty, not out of design, have very much contributed to those provocations which have caused *God* to depart from our Israel. But we see, when *God's* hour is come, and the time of his people's deliverance, even the set time at hand, he cometh, *skipping* over all the mountains of sins and unworthiness that we daily cast in his way," &c.....*Monk and the Army's Address on re-assembling the Long Parliament.*

Even the ingenious and generally accurate Gibbon, is not free from these vices of composition. In his last vol. p. 640, we read, "that Benedict the Fourteenth consecrated a spot which *persecution* and *fable* had stained with the blood of so many Christian martyrs." Here it is evident that the two nouns, one in the figurative, and the other in the literal sense, are wholly inconsistent with each other, and destroy the metaphor or allegory, which ever it may be called; though the author probably meant this mode of expression for a beauty.

After these instances of faulty and imperfect allegories, it is but right that I should give you an example of a good one. It is from Prior's Henry and Emma; and it comes naturally from the lips of an enamoured and virtuous female....

"Did I but purpose to embark with thee
"On the smooth surface of a summer's sea,
"While gentle zephyrs play with prosperous gales,
"And fortune's favour fills the swelling sails:
"But would forsake the ship, and make the shore,
"When the winds whistle, and the tempest roar?
"No, Henry, no! one sacred oath has tied
"Our lives, one destiny our fate shall guide,
"Nor wild nor deep our common way divide."

The following from Shakspeare is perhaps faulty in confounding in some measure the literal with the figu-

rative meaning, as in the fifth line. It is however very beautiful: the third line is finely descriptive....

"This is the state of man: To-day he puts forth
"The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
"And bears his blushing honours thick upon him:
"The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
"And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
"His greatness is a ripening.....nips his root,
"And then he falls," &c. *Henry VIII.*

As I have shewn you also that Mr. Gibbon could commit an error in the construction of a figure, it is but fair to shew you also what he was capable of effecting when on his guard. The example I quote is from the 21st chap. of his history, a work to which I must often refer when I wish to exhibit the force of a fine imagination exerted in producing almost every beauty of style. The historian, in speaking of the speculative dissensions which existed in the Christian church at the period he is describing, adds, "It will not be expected, it would not perhaps be endured, that I should swell this theological digression, by a minute examination of the eighteen creeds, the authors of which, for the most part, disclaimed the odious name of their parent Arius. It is amusing enough to delineate the form, and to trace the vegetation of a singular plant; but the tedious detail of leaves without flowers, and of branches without fruit, would soon exhaust the patience, and disappoint the curiosity of the laborious student."

You will easily see that almost all the rules respecting metaphors are applicable to this kind of allegory. Dr. Blair, I must add, makes a very judicious distinction between these allegorical expressions and common metaphors. Besides the difference in point of length, "a metaphor," he observes, "always explains itself by the words that are connected with it, as when I say Achilles was a lion; an able minister is the pillar of the state; my lion and my pillar are sufficiently interpreted by the mention of Achilles and the minister, which I join to them; but an allegory is, or may be, allowed to

stand more unconnected with the literal meaning, the interpretation not so directly pointed out, but left to our own reflection."

Though confounded under the same name, the second species of allegory to which I alluded differs greatly from that of which we have been treating, that, I mean, which represents a subject under the colour of a fictitious narrative. The few successful attempts of this kind extant, sufficiently evince that it is a species of composition extremely difficult, and indeed it is only tolerable in the hands of a writer of the first order. Even Spencer, though abounding in all the beauties of poetry, is scarcely read, and never interests; yet I must make an exception in favour of the charming vision of Mirza, and some others in the Spectator. I may also recommend most of those in the Adventurer, from the fascinating pen of Dr. Hawksworth.

You will perhaps think me hypercritical in making a distinction between the metaphor, and what I term an allusion. The latter is however a slight reference to some well-known fact or matter of history; and I think can properly class neither under the head of metaphor nor allegory. An instance which will at once explain my meaning, presents itself to my memory from a well-known song of Prior....

> "Obtain'd the chariot for a day,
> "And set the world on fire."

A more beautiful instance is furnished by Mr. Gibbon:

"They (the Jews) cultivated with ardour the theological system of the Athenian sage. But their national pride would have been mortified by a fair confession of their former poverty, and they boldly marked, as the sacred inheritance of their ancestors, the gold and jewels which they had so lately stolen from their Egyptian masters."....GIBBON'S DECLINE AND FALL, c. 24.

The following will probably be ranked as a comparison:

"If it be the obscure, the minute, the ceremonial part of religion for which we are contending, though the triumph be empty, the dispute is dangerous. Like the men of Ai we pursue perhaps some little party that flies before us, we are eager that not a straggler may escape; but when we look behind, our city is in flames." ....DR. OGDEN'S SERMONS.

The figure called *catachresis*, which I hope I need not tell you means an *abuse* of words, is commonly no more than a violent or over-strained metaphor, as when we say of a person for whom we have little respect, "that he *inflicted* an obligation upon us." The vivid imagination of Mr. Burke was very fond of this figure: thus when he called the hair-brained revolutionists of France "architects of ruin," it was certainly a catachresis; but it was a very fine one.

All these figures you will easily perceive are derived from the relation of resemblance; and as metaphysicians have connected under one head the relations of resemblance and contrariety, I think I may be allowed to conclude this letter with the notice of an important figure derived from this latter quality, I mean the *antithesis*.

The *antithesis* in general, even the serious kind, may be considered as a species of witticism, and is therefore a much more favourite figure with the moderns than with the ancients. For however inferior we may be to the classical writers in other instances, in wit and humour the moderns undoubtedly excel them. The only ancient writer that I know who is very fond of the antithesis, is Seneca the rhetorician, in whose compositions this figure is continually and disgustingly introduced. Great as is my veneration for Dr. Johnson, I cannot help suspecting that he early studied in the school of Seneca, and that he there imbibed that predilection for the antithesis so conspicuous in his otherwise incomparable writings.

The French were among the first of the moderns who cultivated the antithesis. The letters of Voiture, which are very studied, and not a little affected, are full

of them. It is, however, the language of compliment, and what is called "a well turned compliment," is often no more than a pointed antithesis. Thus the writer, whom I just mentioned, tells his friend Balzac, "that self-knowledge, which was a cause of humility to other men, must with him have a quite contrary effect."

Antitheses seem to have been introduced, at least the abuse of them, into the English language in the time of Charles II. With other species of false wit they pervaded all the eloquence of the day. Even the pulpit was not free from them, and we are often disgusted with the harsh antithesis of South; take for example one sentence.....

"These were notions not descending from us, but born with us; not our offspring, but our brethren; and (as I may so say) such as were taught without the help of a teacher."

There are hardly any rules to be observed respecting the introduction and the use of antitheses; your own taste and discretion must be your only guides. I may however in the first place remark, that as they always appear the effect of study, they are never natural in impassioned language. On the stage, therefore, they are seldom introduced with propriety, as they are neither the suitable expression of passion, nor can be supposed to occur naturally in conversation. As they do not accord with the passionate, and are efforts too minute for the sublime, it forms an objection against that inimitable poem, the Night Thoughts, that it abounds too much with this figure. The sublimity of the following lines is destroyed by the epigrammatic turn.....

"Even silent night proclaims my soul immortal,
"Even silent night proclaims eternal day:
"For human weal Heaven husbands all events,
"Dull sleep instructs, nor sport vain dreams in vain."

In those compositions, however, where we expect the sport of fancy, and which may be supposed to have

cost the author some study, the effect of a spirited antithesis is considerable; and the less studied it appears the better. The two following (both from the same author) are natural and easy:

"The use of the dagger is seldom adopted in public councils, as long as they retain any confidence in the power of the sword."....GIBBON'S HISTORY, c. 25.

"In the horrid massacre of Thessalonica, the cruel Rufinus inflamed the fury without imitating the repentance of Theodosius."....IBID.

Writers of genius, it is true, sometimes unite the pathetic, and even the sublime, with this figure, as in the following instances from Dr. Johnson:

"Wherever the eye is turned it sees much misery, and there is much which it sees not; many complaints are heard, and there are many pangs without complaint."....SERMONS.

In speaking of the pride of talents also...."The time will come, it will come quickly, when it shall profit us more to have subdued one proud thought, than to have numbered the host of heaven."....IBID.

We should observe, as a 2d rule, to beware of their too frequent introduction; for a reader may tire even of brilliancy. Beautiful as the compositions of Dr. Johnson are, I have sometimes felt a sameness in them; a number of sentences ending in the same way, and reading almost like a chapter in the book of Proverbs. Mr. Gibbon is also too fond of antitheses; the figure is indeed better suited to discussion than to narrative.

3dly. The antithesis should rather be in things than in words, and should not only have contrast but ingenuity to recommend it. A late writer on education puts in opposition "a *false* quantity and a *false* assertion." This is too much like a pun.

In few words the antithesis, like every figure, receives animation and elegance from the hand of genius; but nothing can be more frigid than a string of trite antitheses from a dull writer. I would much rather have plain fact, and plain truth, from such authors, than the

affectation of wit and elegance. The imitators of Dr. Johnson have miserably failed, not because they were unable to ape his manner, but because they wanted the solidity of his observation, and the brilliancy of his fancy.

LETTER XIII.

METONYMY.....SYNECDOCHE.....PERIPHRASIS.....PERSONIFICATION.....APOSTROPHE.....HYPERBOLE.....IRONY.

MY DEAR JOHN,

NOT to detain you much longer in the rudiments of rhetoric, I shall proceed without preface to those figures, which are derived from the other relations of cause and effect, and contiguity.

You need not be informed that the word metonymy implies a *change* of *name*, or, in other words, the substitution of some characteristic circumstance or quality for the name or word by which a thing is usually known.

It is chiefly, I might almost say entirely, from the relation of cause and effect that this figure is derived. Thus the cause is put for the effect, when the inventor's name is used for the thing invented. Instead of a serious example, take one that will amuse you better, from the treatise on the Bathos....

> " Lac'd in her Cosins* new appear'd the bride,
> " A *bubble-boy*† and *Tompion*‡ at her side,
> " And with an air divine her Colmar§ ply'd :
> " Then oh! she cries, what slaves I round me see;
> " Here a bright red-coat, there a smart *toupee*."**

Agreeably to this figure, the author's name is employed to designate his works; as when I say, "I have read Homer, Virgil, or Milton," for the works of Ho-

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* Stays. † Tweezer case. ‡ Watch. § Fan.
** A head-dress. All names taken, I believe, from eminent workmen or dealers in those articles.

mer, &c.; and this is so common, that it is no harsh expression to say "I have read such a writer."

> "Trojani belli scriptorem, maxime Lolli,
> "Dum tu declamas Romæ, Præneste relegi."
> *Hor. Ep.* 2.

> "While you, my Lollius, on some chosen theme,
> "With youthful eloquence at Rome declaim,
> "I read the Grecian poet o'er again." *Francis.*

Again the effect or instrument is employed for the cause as "the tongue (that is the eloquence of Cicero) defended the cause of virtue and the republic;" "Pallida mors" (in Horace) for death that makes pale. The adjunct is used for the substantive, as when we speak of the *fasces* for the magistrate; and Virgil says, "bibit Germania Tigrim," mentioning the country for the inhabitants. In short, it is unnecessary to multiply instances, as metonymies occur in every page of every book, and in almost every sentence of conversation.

I need not remind you that the *synecdoche* (or *figure of comprehension*) according to old Farnaby, "takes the whole for the part, or the part for the whole," as the genus for the species, or the species for the genus; and is of consequence, evidently dependant on the same relation: thus a man is said to get his *bread* by his labour, when bread is taken to signify the whole of subsistence.

The circumstance which forms the principal difficulty of translation is, that metaphors, metonymies, and synecdoches, are often intranslatable; and the corresponding words are, in the new language, often trite or obscure.

The *periphrasis* is a metonymy in which more words than usual are employed, as when we speak of "the Lover of Daphne," to designate Apollo. Mr. Gibbon raises his style very beautifully by the use of this figure. It is also common with the Orientals, as "the son of Nouraddin," instead of the proper name of the person.

One of the most animated figures, when properly introduced, and managed with delicacy and judgment, is

the *prosopopœia* or personification. It has some alliance with the metaphor, but still more with the metonymy; and indeed seems in most cases to the latter what the allegory is to the metaphor. Thus, when we say "Youth and beauty are laid in the dust," it is not easy to determine whether it is a metonymy or a prosopopœia. This figure is the soul of poetry, and of lyric poetry in particular. It

"Gives to airy nothing
"A local habitation and a name."

In a production of an excellent poetess of our own times, there is a very fine specimen of this figure, as well as of most of the beauties of poetry.....

"Loud howls the storm, the vex'd Atlantic roars,
"Thy genius, Britain, wanders on its shores!
"Hears cries of horror wafted from afar,
"The groans of anguish 'mid the shrieks of war!
"Hears the deep curses of the great and brave,
"Sigh in the wind and murmur in the wave!
"O'er his damp brow the sable crape he binds,
"And throws his victor garland to the wind."

Miss Seward's Monody on Major Andre.

In all the lyric poems of Collins, you will find very fine examples of the prosopopœia. None perhaps more pleasing than the opening of his Ode to Mercy....

"O thou, who sit'st a smiling bride
"By valour's arm'd and awful side,
"Gentlest of sky-born forms, and best ador'd:
"Who oft with songs, divine to hear,
"Win'st from his fatal grasp the spear,
"And hid'st in wreaths of flow'rs his bloodless sword."

"Thou, who, amidst the deathful field,
"By godlike chiefs alone beheld,
"Oft with thy bosom bare art found,
"Pleading for him, the youth who sinks to ground."

Here are two very fine pictures, the embodied quality or character in two most interesting situations.

There is another striking instance in a contemporary poet, which is also accompanied with a fine allusion. You will recollect the lines are addressed to Mr. Gibbon.....

" Humility herself, divinely mild,
" Sublime religion's meek and modest child,
" Like the dumb son of Crœsus, in the strife,
" When force assail'd his father's sacred life,
" Breaks silence, and with filial duty warm,
" Bids thee revere her parent's hallowed form!"
Huyley's Essay on History.

But though personification is particularly adapted to poetry, yet this figure serves frequently to adorn the works of the best prose writers. I have seldom found a bolder instance than one in Tacitus, An. 16. 21.....

" Trucidatis tot insignibus viris, ad postremum Nero virtutem ipsam exscindere concupivit, interfectò Thrasea," &c.

" After the slaughter of so many distinguished men, Nero meditated at length the extirpation of virtue herself, by the murder of Thrasea."

Dr. Ogden, who is so fertile in beauties that I am obliged to have continual recourse to him, will also furnish us with another example.....

" Truth (says he) is indeed of an awful presence, and must never be affronted with the rudeness of direct opposition; yet will she consent for a moment to pass unregarded, while your respects are offered to her sister charity."

The use of the abstract for the concrete, as treachery, for treacherous men; modesty, for modest men, &c. is a kind of personification, and adds greatly to the animation of a discourse, as in this instance from Junius's Letters.....

" As for Mr. W——n, there is something in him which even treachery cannot trust."

Much of the spirit of Dr. Johnson's compositions depends upon this artful use of language; and he is, I think, improperly censured for it, by a gentleman, whose

lively talents and genuine humour have often engaged and interested the first assembly in this kingdom, and who favoured the public with an excellent criticism in verse on that great man's character and writings.

The 1st rule to be observed with respect to the prosopopœia is, that whenever it is introduced, the picture it presents should be complete. For this reason the following example is perfectly ridiculous.....

" Invidious *grave*, how dost thou *rend in sunder*
" Whom love has knit, and sympathy made one."
Blair's Grave.

The idea of a *grave rending in sunder*, you see makes a very indifferent picture. I should not however have quoted this poem, had it not been made a subject of panegyric by a modern critic, whose genius is at least equal to his eccentricity.

2dly. Mean and vulgar objects should never be personified: for as the prosopopœia is a bold figure, it should only be introduced to confer dignity on a subject. It follows of course that nothing vulgar or contemptible should be allowed to disgrace the figure. For this reason the following image from the poem I have just quoted, is not only unpoetical, but disgusting....

" ..... O great *man-eater !*
" Whose every day is carnival, not sated yet !
" Like one whole days defrauded of his meals,
" On whom lank *hunger* lays his *skinny* hand."

Here are two personifications, and the imagery, as well as the language in both, is as mean and colloquial as possible. The same want of dignity, and the same impropriety, pervade all the imagery of this writer. For instance.....

" Now tame and humble, like *a child that's whipt,*
" *Shake hands with* dust."

Here is another most extraordinary picture, "a man

shaking hands with dust." Such writers are of use, because they teach us better than any precept can, what to avoid.

3dly. I do not subscribe to Dr. Blair's rule, "that this figure should never be attempted but when prompted by strong passion;" for in the happiest instances I have already given, there is no passion at all. Indeed it seems to me more a figure of fancy than of passion, and it is most happily introduced in those compositions where the fancy sports most uncontrolled, as in lyric productions. In very serious compositions, however, it is sometimes well introduced accompanied with passion; but then the effect will be destroyed if it appears artificial; for all art is inconsistent with strong emotion.

The *apostrophe* is a more animated prosopopœia, where the object personified is addressed in the second person. A real personage, however, may be addressed in an apostrophe, but he must be supposed either dead or absent; which almost reduces it to a mere personification. It is a figure more fit for poetry than prose; and nothing can excuse it in the latter but the very effervescence of passion. On this account, though it may be tolerated in oratory, it cannot be admitted in narrative or didactic compositions. In truth, the French preachers, who are very partial to this figure, render their discourses sometimes exceedingly frigid, by its too frequent and artificial introduction.

The apostrophe never was more properly and naturally introduced than in Lear's address to the elements, when discarded and turned out by Regan. There is a peculiar beauty in this part.....

> " ..... Spit fire, spout rain!
> " Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters.
> " I tax not you, ye elements, with unkindness,
> " I never gave you kingdom, called you children,
> " You owe me no subscription," &c.

That of Eve in the 11th book of Paradise Lost, v. 269, is also beautiful and proper.....

" O unexpected stroke, worse than of death!
" Must I thus leave thee, Paradise, thus leave
" Thee, native soil, these happy walks and shades,
" Fit haunt of Gods! Where I had hope to spend,
" Quiet, though sad, the respite of that day
" That must be mortal to us both. O flowers
" That never will in other climate grow,
" My early visitation and my last
" At even, which I bred up with tender hand,
" From the first opening bud, and gave you names;
" Who now shall rear ye to the sun, or rank
" Your tribes, and water from th' ambrosial fount?" &c.

I have already laid down one rule concerning the use of this figure, which is, that it is only adapted to impassioned expression, otherwise its introduction is frigid, if not ridiculous. I may add, as a second rule, that it should always be made with gravity and dignity. The following instance is a breach of both these rules....

" ..... But tell us, why this waste,
" Why this *ado* in *earthing* up a carcase
" That's fall'n into disgrace, and to the sense
" Smells horrible! Ye *Undertakers!* tell us."
Blair's Grave.

The *hyperbole* is nothing more than an excess of figurative language; the effect, when it is natural, of passion. All the passions are inclined to magnify their objects. Injuries seem greater than they really are to those who have received them; and dangers, to those who are in fear. The lover naturally makes a divinity of his mistress; valour and contempt are equally inclined to degrade and diminish. This figure, therefore, in particular, requires passion to give it force or propriety; and if this is not the case, it renders a style very bombastic and frigid. Lucan is too fond of this figure. See the first six lines of Rowe's Lucan, where

" The sun.....
" ..... sicken'd to behold Emathia's plain,
" And would have sought the backward east again."

And in book vi. v. 329.....

" The missive arms fix'd all around he wears,
" And even his safety in his wounds he bears,
" Fenc'd with a fatal wood, a deadly grove of spears."

Nothing indeed can be more bombastic than the whole description of this warrior's death. The poet calls upon the Pompeians to lay siege to him as they would to a town; to bring battering engines, flames, racks, &c. to subdue him. He is first compared to an elephant, and again to a hunted boar; at length.....

" When none were left him to repel,
" Fainting for want of foes the victor fell."

The above instances may serve to shew how easily the hyperbolical style may slide into the ridiculous. The last of them is only surpassed by one which is quoted by the authors of the Bathos....

" He roar'd so loud, and look'd so wondrous grim,
" His very shadow durst not follow him."

Or another from the same assemblage of humour. The poet is speaking of a frighted stag, who

" Hears his own feet, and thinks they sound like more,
" And fears the hind feet will o'ertake the fore."

One more I cannot help transcribing. It is the description of that elegant entertainment a bull-baiting, by Sir Richard Blackmore.....

" *Up to the stars* the sprawling mastiffs fly,
" And add new monsters to the *frighted* sky."

Nothing in short can be more fertile in the ridiculous than the awkward attempts of bad writers at the hyperbole. On this account, I can give you no better rule with respect to the use of it, than to employ it as little as possible.

Irony has been classed as a figure of rhetoric by Farnaby, and other writers of equal taste and brilliancy; but with deference to such high authorities, I would rather consider it as a style of writing than as a figure of speech. Dr. Priestley observes, that "all irony is humour, but all humour is not irony." In other words, irony is a species of humour, and if you will attend to the definition of humour, which I attempted in Letter VI. viz. that it depends upon the same principle of contrast as wit; but that in humour, the mind of the reader or auditor is left to make the comparison for itself, and form the contrast; you will find that it strictly applies to irony. This figure (if a figure we must call it) generally consists in giving undeserved praise, implying censure on the object; or conveying censure under the appearance of praise; but the former is the most common. I remember however a very pretty stroke of irony of the latter kind. When the King of Prussia, Frederic II. published his poem on the art of war, he took no notice of Marlborough. On this circumstance, the Monthly Reviewers remarked, "that they presumed his Majesty had omitted the name of Marlborough, in the catalogue of distinguished commanders, because he might deem him deficient in one branch of his profession, having never on any occasion evinced his skill in *conducting* a *retreat*."

The greatest master in irony is Swift; and his "Tale of a Tub" is the most complete specimen extant of ironical composition. To select examples would be to transcribe almost half the book. Take therefore the first that occurs in the "Dedication to Prince Posterity."

"To affirm that our age is altogether unlearned, and devoid of writers of any kind, seems to be an assertion so bold and false, that I have been sometime thinking, the contrary may almost be proved by uncontrollable demonstration. It is true indeed, that although their numbers be vast, and their productions numerous in proportion, yet are they hurried so hastily off the scene, that they escape our memory, and elude our sight."

"What is then become of those immense bales of paper, which must needs have been employed in such numbers of books; can these also be wholly annihilated, and so of a sudden as I pretend? What shall I say in return to so invidious an objection; it ill befits the distance between your highness and me, to send you for ocular demonstration to a jakes or an oven; to the windows of a bawdy-house, or to a sordid lanthern. Books, like men their authors, have no more than one way of coming into the world, but there are ten thousand to go out of it, and return no more."

The force and delicacy of this irony may be easily understood without a comment. The sarcastic author, passes a most severe censure on his contemporaries, under the colour of a very moderate and well-conducted defence.

Let it be observed that more exaggerated praise, even though it evidently appears extravagant, and meant for ridicule, is not irony. To constitute that, there must be a sarcastic archness, which, if not actual wit, must very nearly approach it, and must at least be humour. I shall conclude with the finest specimen of this figure extant in any language.....

"HERE continueth to rot
The Body of
FRANCIS CHARTRES,
Who with an INFLEXIBLE CONSTANCY,
And INIMITABLE UNIFORMITY of Life,
PERSISTED,
In spite of AGE and INFIRMITIES,
In the Practice of EVERY HUMAN VICE,
Excepting PRODIGALITY and HYPOCRISY:
His insatiable AVARICE exempted him from the first,
His matchless IMPUDENCE from the second.
Nor was he more singular
In the undeviating *Pravity* of his *Manners*,
Than successful
In *Accumulating* WEALTH:
For, without TRADE or PROFESSION,
Without TRUST of PUBLIC MONEY,
And without BRIBE-WORTHY Service,

He acquired, or more properly created,
A MINISTERIAL ESTATE.
He was the only Person of his Time
Who could CHEAT without the Mask of HONESTY,
Retain his Primæval MEANNESS
When possess'd of TEN THOUSAND a year;
And having daily deserved the GIBBET for what he *did*,
Was at last condemn'd to it for what he *could* not *do*.
Oh Indignant Reader!
Think not his Life useless to Mankind;
PROVIDENCE conniv'd at his execrable Designs,
To give to After-ages
A conspicuous PROOF and EXAMPLE,
Of how small Estimation is EXORBITANT WEALTH
In the Sight of GOD,
By his bestowing it on the most UNWORTHY of ALL MORTALS."

A figure which the Greeks call *paraleipsis*, borders upon irony, and is sometimes united with it. From the name you will perceive that it implies an affectation of omission, as when an orator exclaims, "I refrain from touching on the rapacity, the venality, the exceeding corruption of the person I accuse; I confine myself to the point," &c. Cicero makes a very free use of this figure; and the late Mr. Burke, who made that great master his model, was particularly fond of it.

Dr. Blair has enumerated two or three other forms of expression as figures of rhetoric; and that I may not leave this sketch imperfect, I shall conclude this letter with a short notice of them. The first of these is *interrogation*, of which (he observes) we have many fine instances in the poetical and prophetical parts of Scripture...."God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" The effect of this mode of expression will be very evident, if the sense is preserved, and the words thrown out of this interrogative form. "What he hath said he will do, and what he hath spoken he will make good." Also in St. Matthew, ch. xi. v. 7 and 9. "And as they departed, he began to say unto the multitude concerning John. What went ye out into the

wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? but what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they that wear soft raiment are in kings' houses: but what went ye out for to see? A prophet, yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet."

Exclamation is a stronger figure than the former. The best rule that can be given with regard to it, is, that you should attend to the manner in which the passion you describe would naturally vent itself. The figure must be seldom used, as it will appear very ridiculous, unless where the passions of the hearers are much inflamed.

The same author observes, that some writers fill their books with points of admiration! as if the points were sufficient to produce that passion by a magical power, when their sentiments are perfectly frigid. Nearly allied to this is another trick, which has been much employed by modern authors, i. e. filling their writings with black lines, as if every sentence was so important as to deserve applause. Dr. Blair calls this a typographical figure, and it is well adapted to some contemptible writers, and that herd of novelists, who have nothing either in their matter or style to attract attention. There was another custom used not long ago, which modern writers have justly laid aside; they wrote every word which they thought emphatic in Italic characters. Though this may be very proper with respect to some very energetic words, yet the too frequent use of them only dazzles the sight, without informing the understanding.

Dr. Blair remarks also another figure, which he calls *vision*, by which we describe a thing that is past or absent as if passing immediately before our eyes: by it we place things in a very lively manner before our readers, an example of which may be found in Cicero's fourth oration against Catiline. "Cum vero mihi proposui regnantem Lentulum," &c. It is not easy to give any rules concerning the management of this figure; it requires, indeed, great caution, and its use ought to be almost exclusively restricted to very passionate orations.

Repetition is another animated figure remarked by the same writer; by this we repeat the most material words of a sentence, in order to make the impression the stronger. There is an example of this in Virgil, when Orpheus laments his lost wife Eurydice.....

" Te, dulcis conjux te, solo in littore secum
" Te, veniente die, te decedente canebat."

To the same purpose Mr. Pope....

" By foreign hands thy dying eyes were clos'd,
" By foreign hands thy decent limbs compos'd,
" By foreign hands thy humble grave adorn'd,
" By strangers honour'd and by strangers mourn'd."

The finest instance of this is, however, in St. Paul's 2d Epistle to the Corinthians, ch. xi. v. 22. " Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they the ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft."

I have already treated of the *climax* in a former letter; all that is necessary to remark here is, that it is commonly classed as a figure of rhetoric.

LETTER XIV.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON COMPOSITION.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I HAVE endeavoured to give you as correct a notion as I can of all the figures of rhetoric which deserve the name. To enter into the minuteness of Farnaby would be trifling, and only perplex. There was scarcely a form or idiom of language for which the Greeks did not invent a name; and it is to be lamented that much of their science consisted only in giving names.

Even in what I have done, I fear you will apply to me the remark of Butler, formerly quoted. Yet let it be remembered, that it is at least an accomplishment to know how literary men, both ancient and modern, have specified and defined the various modes of expression.

I shall have frequently to call your attention to something of more importance than style, the matter and form of the different species of composition. Yet even here what has been advanced on the subject of style will not be found useless. Independent of those qualities which every good style ought to possess.....perspicuity, purity, and harmony....you will have to apply much of what I have advanced to the different kinds of composition of which we are now to treat. It is evident that some will be improved by an ornamental or florid style; that in others, figurative language must be sparingly employed, while on some subjects it would be an absolute vice.

All kinds of composition may be classed under two general divisions: prose, and poetry; and it will be most natural and easy to treat in the first instance of the former.

Prose compositions may again be arranged in the following classes: 1st. Didactic and argumentative; 2d.

Oratorical; 3d. Narrative and descriptive. The first will comprehend every thing relating to moral, political, or natural philosophy; all treatises on the arts or sciences; all discussions or controversies, which do not come under the second division of the oratorical or declamatory. The second division will include not only the three great branches of oratory.....the senate, the bar, and the pulpit; but also much of controversy, political pamphlets, and every thing that assumes a declamatory form. The letters of Junius, though under the epistolary title, may be classed as political declamations.

The last division will extend not only to real but fictitious history, memoirs, books of travels, and even many compositions which rank as essays, but which are in reality either narratives or descriptions. The three kinds will be found sometimes blended in one production, as in Thucydides and Livy will be found almost as much of oratory as of mere narrative; though this is a style of composition which I would not recommend.

It is obvious, that in didactic or argumentative compositions, works of reasoning, a florid or figurative style is very improperly introduced: yet in what are called moral essays, such as the Spectators, Ramblers, and Adventurers, a style moderately florid is far from misplaced. The truth is, these productions partake more or less of the nature either of poetry or oratory. They are in a great measure works of imagination, and therefore the ornaments of fancy are not improperly bestowed upon them.

There are few productions of the narrative kind which will not admit of ornament. The ancient historians are, however, rather more chaste in this respect, except where they professedly introduce an oration. Books of travels are mostly descriptive; and description admits of even more ornament than narrative. It indeed approaches to poetry, and almost admits of equal licence.

But of all the different kinds of prose composition, oratory admits of the greatest variety of ornament. It allows occasionally of almost all the figures which are

appropriated to poetry, and of some almost peculiar to itself. It is, therefore, to this branch of composition that the art of rhetoric particularly applies; and the ancient rhetoricians were mere teachers of oratory.

In treating critically of the different kinds of composition, both prose and verse, I shall have to enforce more particularly these observations In the mean time, as this letter is of a miscellaneous character, I shall conclude it with a few practical rules, which you will find useful in the acquisition of a good style; some from my own practice and observation, and some from other authors.

1st. As we have been treating so lately of figurative language, my first observation will apply to it. Never be anxious to embellish your compositions in this way. Never study to find out comparisons or metaphors to adorn your discourse. Figurative language, when it is good, comes spontaneously from a lively imagination, or from a mind richly stored by the perusal of the best authors.

2d. Avoid common-place metaphors. Nothing can be more disgusting than an accumulation of trite and common allusions. The plainest style is preferable; and figures to be pleasing should always have something ingenious and uncommon to recommend them. Such a style as I have now been deprecating, is always frigid, and commonly characterized as fustian or bombast.

3d. To write well you should study to acquire a clear idea of the subject. Some may suppose that this has no connection with style; but the case is otherwise, for unless you understand what you write upon, you can never make others understand you. When you are to write, you are to reflect upon all the parts of the subject; and when you have acquired a clear view of it, the words will come of course, though probably they will admit of much amendment. Do not however stop the ardour of composition for the sake of a single word or phrase, but leave it a blank when a proper one does not occur, or rather take the word that presents itself, and mark it to be afterwards corrected.

4th. You should often compose. No rules are sufficient to form a complete and correct writer without exercise and habit. I do not mean that you should compose *much;* on the contrary, by writing too fast at first you may contract bad habits, which will require much trouble before they can be removed. Endeavour therefore to write well, rather than fast. When you have done, lay by the composition till you have forgotten your attachment to any particular phrase in it, and afterwards survey it with a critical eye; you will then be more able to prune redundances, and to smooth the periods.

5th. I again repeat, peruse the best authors with a particular attention to their style. By this means you will lay in a store of words, and insensibly adopt their modes of expression. Take care to mark every thing peculiar in their manner, so that you may know how afterwards either to adopt or to avoid it.

6th. There is no practice better than to translate passages from good classical authors, or to give the thoughts of a good writer in your own language, and compare it afterwards carefully with the original. Take, for instance, a passage from Addison or Blair; read it three or four times, and when you have made yourself master of all the sentiments, lay aside the book, and clothe them in your own language; then compare your own performance, after you have rendered it as correct as possible, with the original; by this means you will be able to discover your own faults.

7th. Avoid all servile imitation of others; for by imitation you will be prevented from attempting any thing of your own, and your barrenness will at length be discovered. Never transcribe passages from other writers as your own: this effectually bars all efforts of genius, and exposes you to the ridicule of men of learning.

8th. Always endeavour to adapt the style to the subject; for nothing can be more ridiculous than to clothe grave subjects in a vain and gaudy dress; or embellish dry reasoning, which must convince only by strength of argument. In oratorical compositions you must also

adapt your discourse to the generality of your audience; nothing can be more absurd than to use extravagant phrases, or unknown words, before an unlearned multitude; the ignorant may admire, but the learned will smile.

9th. Give at all times more attention to your thoughts than to your words. We may learn almost mechanically a few fine phrases; but in a man of true genius alone the sentiments are grand and noble.

I do not mean, however, to discourage you from the cultivation of a good style. The remark of Quinctilian, "that a clear conception will generally be attended with correct expression" is so far true, that we know the knowledge of words always accompanies the knowledge of things; and as almost all our knowledge is acquired by means of words, we cannot have the one without the other. Otherwise the attainment of arts and sciences appears to me a perfectly distinct branch of study, and I can conceive a man master of even a practical art, such as chemistry or mechanics, and to want names for his ideas. However, thus far is certain, that the elegant part of speaking or writing is at least a distinct study, and therefore not to be neglected; though it will be found of little value without a sound knowledge of things.

LETTER XV.

DIDACTIC COMPOSITION.....ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN my last letter I promised to conduct you from words to things; from style to the matter and arrangement of composition. In pursuing the order also which I before pointed out, we are to consider didactic composition.

I do not know a greater difficulty than that which presents itself to a young writer with respect to the method or arrangement which he is to pursue in an essay or discourse on any given subject. Ideas crowd upon his mind; he sees the subject in various points of view; but he is uncertain what observation ought first to be introduced to the notice of his reader, or in what light his subject will appear the clearest, and to the most advantage. Here the rules of art may occasionally deliver him from some embarrassment; and at least a general process may be laid down as the means of investigating truth, or communicating knowledge.

Logicians have established, and I think not improperly, two methods in which didactic or argumentative disquisitions are to be conducted. These methods are *analysis* and *synthesis*. The analytical method is when we proceed from particulars to the establishment of some general truth. Thus Derham, in his Physico theology, ascends from the investigation of the several parts of nature, to the proof that they must be the work of an all powerful and intelligent being. Dr. Clarke, on the contrary, in his admirable work on the being and attributes of God, commences with a simple proposition, that "something must have existed from eternity;"

he proceeds to shew what must have been the nature and attributes of such a being, and by the force of this one fundamental axiom, establishes all the principles which are the basis of natural, I might add of revealed religion.

A similar method is adopted in Warburton's Divine Legation, a work however which I never admired. The foundation of this work is laid in a kind of syllogism, though I confess I cannot see that the consequence flows naturally from the major and the minor. It is, 1st. That the doctrine of a future state is necessary to the well-being of civil society, and therefore was taught by the wisest legislators of antiquity. 2d. That this doctrine makes no part of the Mosaic dispensation. 3dly. That therefore the law of Moses is of divine original.

The learned author has, in my opinion, failed in the proof of all his propositions; but it is enough to remark at present, that he branches this syllogism out into five volumes, adducing an infinite number of authorities and facts under each of the separate heads.

The analytical method is the only mode in which truth is to be investigated; for this reason it is the method adopted in algebraic investigations, and in those of experimental philosophy, where the author, from comparing the number of particular observations, and tracing the analogy between them, arrives at a general conclusion.*

Where a science is to be taught, on the contrary, the synthetic seems the most commodious method, and it is therefore that which is adopted by geometricians. With these, therefore, a theorem or proposition is laid

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* In this manner truths of the greatest importance are gradually laid open to persons whose curiosity is deeply interested in the process. Nor is the full design of the philosopher perceived by his antagonist, until the conclusion, which he aims to establish, strikes at last with irresistible evidence upon the mind.....*Ogilvie on Composition.*

down, and is then proved or demonstrated. Sermons, except those which follow the order of the text, and a majority of what are called moral essays, are in the synthetical form; though it is not often that we find either of these modes separately pursued.

In works where it is the object of the writers to take their readers by surprise, and to establish a false conclusion, they find the analytical method to answer their purpose the best; for the chain of reasoning ascending from particulars to generals is often complicated, and the connexion of it with the conclusion is not easily discovered. Dr. Priestley observes, that the most valuable part of Mr. Hume's "Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals," is nearly the same as that part of Mr. Hutchinson's moral philosophy, which corresponds to it, and may most properly be termed analytical. In order to determine the foundation of virtue, he considers particularly every thing that is acknowledged to gain the esteem of mankind, examining upon what common property their encomiums turn, and in what manner their approbation is bestowed; and having found that nothing is the object of esteem but what is *useful to society*, and that the several virtues are classed in the first and second rank of importance, according as they are more or less essential to the well-being of society, he concludes that *public utility* is the foundation of all moral virtue.

In Dr. Hartley's observations on man, on the contrary, the argument is strictly synthetical, and even geometrical. The author begins with definitions and axioms, such as are employed by geometricians; he lays down formal propositions, and advances such proof as the nature of the case will admit. He deduces formal *corollaries* from almost every proposition; in the *scholia* he explains the nature of his proofs, and shews in what manner evidence is reflected from one part to another.

I do not know any study more improving to young persons than to mark and consider the manner in which a great author conducts a disquisition; for there is fre-

quently not less force and power in the arrangement than in the matter and arguments themselves.

The Republic of Plato is a very celebrated work; and a short abstract, or rather outline, of it, may possibly entertain you. The work is in dialogue; but as there is only one principal speaker, Socrates, it may be regarded as a disquisition. The professed intention of the author is to describe and define the nature of justice; this he does by a fanciful analogy, in the tracing of which he pursues the analytical method. He founds an imaginary city, and shews the advantage of each person practising some art which may be useful to the community, and practising that alone. He then divides his city into three classes: 1st. Those who pursue the arts of husbandry, mechanics, &c. 2d. The military, or a few chosen for the defence of the rest. 3d. The magistrates and counsellors, who are to administer the laws and regulate the police. This therefore is the order of the city; but if one class (says he) should infringe on the proper business of the other, if the artizans or soldiers, being unskilled in the arts of governing, should pretend to rule, confusion and the dissolution of the state is the necessary consequence; and this constitutes the political nature of injustice.

In like manner man is endued with certain faculties, appetites and passions, the end of which is the general good of the whole; and these may be divided into three classes....the appetitive, the irascible, and the reasonable; answering to the three classes constituted in the city. The rational is the governing and consultive power, and the irascible is the defensive, and is properly the guard and confederate to it. If, then, at any time the appetitive should assume the superiority, or the irascible part would subject every thing to his sway, the harmony is broken, and the man, of consequence, will act unjustly, &c. Ἀρέτη μεν ἀρα ὡς ἐοικεν, ὑγιεια τε τις αν ειη και καλλος και ευεξια ψυχης, κακια δε νοσος τε και αισχος και ασθενεια. "For virtue (says he) is the health and beauty, and sound constitution of the soul; vice, on the contrary, is disease, and barrenness, and debility."....Rep. book iv.

Though I read much of Plato in my youth, I do not recommend to you to spend much time upon him. I remember he was far from satisfying either my friend Gilbert Wakefield or myself, when we read him. He abounds too much in minute and metaphysical distinctions, which are of little value, and can only be accounted in general a most elegant and ingenious trifler. Yet candour ought to make allowances for the age in which he lived. He was a divine, while totally ignorant of a true system of theology; and a moralist in a time when human nature was depraved by the grossest prejudices and perversions. Had the light of Christianity but dawned upon his mind, he would have been the first of philosophers. He would probably not have lost himself in the mist of idle speculation, but would have pursued the star which drew the sages from the East; like them he would have worshipped, not with an idolatrous adoration, but "in spirit and in truth."

If I recollect rightly, the analytical method is pursued in almost all the dialogues of Plato. It seems indeed the only method that can be followed with success whenever the Socratic mode of reasoning (that which draws a conclusion from the concessions of your adversary) is employed. It is often a very pleasing method of inculcating truth, for the curiosity of the hearer or reader becomes frequently deeply interested in the process. The full design of the speaker is not perceived until the conclusion he aims to establish strikes with irresistible force upon the mind.

But however useful the analytical method may be where a prejudice is to be removed, or a new truth presented to the mind, still in works purely didactic or preceptive, the synthetic is the simplest, and the most readily comprehended.

In all disquisitions, or argumentative or didactic works, method and arrangement is of almost as much importance as either the matter or the style. The *lucidus ordo* is recommended by the earliest critics; and the remark of Pliny ought to be impressed upon the mind of every young writer, that "Even barbarians *can*

express themselves with force and brilliancy; but to arrange with propriety, and dispose with elegance the parts of a work, is the task only of the learned."* Never therefore sit down to write before you have well digested in your mind the plan and order of what you intend. It is even useful to commit to writing a sketch of the method in which you mean to pursue your subject. This is indeed necessary to perfection in any art; for a good painter always makes certain of a good and correct outline or design, before he sits down to fill up the various lights and shades of the picture.

The talent of methodizing, and that of eliciting detached, though brilliant thoughts, are talents entirely different. The latter is the operation of fancy, with little assistance from the reasoning power; the former is the act of a mind of large powers, and of extensive views of things.

There are two modes of composing, which are occasionally adopted according to the nature of the work, or the genius of the author. The first is when a number of thoughts, which have occurred at different times, but relating to the same subject, have been carefully noted down, and are afterwards arranged and polished at the leisure of the writer. The other mode is, when the writer having, with much reading and reflection, made himself master of the subject, prosecutes the work in a connected order, and writes what spontaneously occurs to his mind. Each of these modes supposes a plan; but in the former case the plan seems to arise out of the materials which have been originally collected, perhaps without much regard to method, and is formed by diligently comparing and digesting them in the order in which they will appear to most advantage. In the other case, the writer follows a plan already conceived,

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* "Utinam ordo saltem et transitus et figuræ simul spectarentur. Nam invenire præclare et enunciare magnificé, interdum barbari solent: *disponere aptè*, varié nisi eruditis negatum est."....*Pliny, Ep.* l. 3. e. 13.

and perhaps even laid down upon paper. Treatises composed in this way, therefore, are more connected, and the parts harmonize with each other much better than in the former case.

In large works, however, and especially in compilations, it is necessary to make collections, though it should not be done without a regard to order; for there is scarcely any mind so rich as to be entire master of every part of a considerable branch of science.

The style of didactic or argumentative compositions should in general be plain and simple. Something will however depend upon the nature of the subject. In works on natural or experimental philosophy, or of deep reasoning upon any subject; where, in short, instruction is more the object than amusement, the style cannot be too simple. In moral and political treatises on the other hand, some scope may be allowed to the imagination, and they will even be the better for some ornament, provided the writer does not indulge in too florid a style. By simplicity I would not be understood to recommend inelegance. In the most simple style, perspicuity, purity, and even harmony, are as much to be regarded as in the most laboured and rhetorical, and perhaps more so. The style of an orator or declaimer may be compared to the full dress of a modern lady of taste and fashion; that of the philosopher should have all the neatness of a young and beautiful quaker.

LETTER XVI.

ORATORY.....PARTS OF AN ORATION.

MY DEAR JOHN,

ORATORICAL compositions might have been comprehended under the preceding division, for they are in general either didactic or argumentative. But the form and style of orations; their intention and object, which is an address in part, at least, to the passions, have, from the first cultivation of letters, placed them in a distinct class; and this division may, as I before intimated, be allowed to include many political declamations, which have not been spoken, and even some compositions on more serious subjects, but which in their style and manner partake more of oratory than of any other art or science.

What has been already observed respecting the synthetical and analytical modes of exposition will also apply to rhetorical compositions; but in these last the directions of critics are rather more minute, as they divide every oration into parts, and the detail and explanation of these will serve in some measure to aid you in what I mentioned as not the least difficult part of composition, the arrangement.

The most ancient writers on rhetoric and oratory have agreed in dividing an oration or discourse into five parts.

1st. The exordium, or introduction.

2d. The narrative (narratio) or what we should in modern language call a statement of the facts.

3d. The division of the arguments.

4th. The argumentative, which is generally the most important part of a discourse.

5th. The peroration, or conclusion.

This order or arrangement one of the fathers of the art affirms to be the very order of nature. "This mode of addressing an audience (says he) is dictated by nature herself; that we should say something introductory, that we should next explain the subject, that we should proceed to the proof or argument, either in confirmation of our own allegation, or in refuting what our adversary urges to the contrary; lastly, that we should conclude by a *peroration*;"* the meaning of which last word implies that it should be something conciliatory.

To these Dr. Blair adds, before the peroration "the pathetic parts;" but this arrangement seems chiefly applicable to a sermon. It has been represented as a trick with some popular preachers to say something pathetic immediately before the conclusion of their sermon to make the audience weep; but such orators, if indeed they are orators, are not to be imitated. When a person remarked to Swift that a Sermon which they had just heard "was very moving," he replied, "Yes, I am sorry for it, for the man is my friend."

But I have a more general reason for rejecting this arrangement of Dr. Blair. The pathetic is a *quality* rather than a part of a discourse, and it may be applicable to any part, frequently to the narrative as much as any other, though I will admit that it is introduced with most effect towards the conclusion, for the orator should seem to warm as he advances; but still to prescribe that whatever is pathetic in an oration should be introduced in a particular place, would be to bind genius down to mechanical rules; and what an audience always expected would soon cease to have effect.

It will not be necessary to be very diffuse in treating of the several parts of an oration. I shall therefore pro-

* "Ut aliquid ante rem dicamus, deinde ut rem exponamus: post ut eam probemus, nostris præsidiis confirmandis, contrariis refutandis; deinde ut concludamus, atque ita peroremus. Hoc dicendi genus natura ipsa præscribit."....*De. Or.* l. 3, c. 13.

ceed in the order I have laid down, and first to the *exordium*.

This part of every discourse, as Cicero observes, is certainly founded on nature and common sense. Was any man to address his superior, whom he did not know, he would not begin his suit abruptly, without knowing whether the party addressed was well affected to him, but would endeavour first to render him propitious to what he was going to advance. Thus, in the beginning of an oration, we should endeavour to render our hearers well disposed, both to the speaker and the subject.

The introduction, says Cicero, must make the hearers docile or tractable; that is, it must render them attentive to what is to be said; but if the subject is of sufficient importance to interest the hearers, or concerns them in a particular manner, it may sometimes be omitted. The critics distinguish two kinds of introductions, one of which they call *principium*, and the other *insinuatio*. The first is a plain explication of the orator's motives; the second is adopted when the judges are supposed to be not well affected towards the orator or his client, and then he must endeavour to remove all prejudices, in order that his discourse may have its full effect; of this kind we have an instance in Cicero's oration against Milo, and one still better in his oration against the Agrarian law.

An introduction, says Cicero, should not be taken from common-place topics, and such as may be applied with equal propriety to a number of different subjects; as that "a desire of happiness is the desire of all men." It should indeed be immediately connected with the subject, and lead, but not abruptly, to it. The beginning of the first letter of Junius I have always considered as a beautiful exordium.

"The submission of a free people to the executive authority of government, is no more than a compliance with laws, which they themselves have enacted. While the national honour is firmly maintained abroad, and while justice is impartially administered at home, the obedience of the subject will be voluntary, cheerful, and

I might almost say unlimited. A generous nation is grateful even for the preservation of its rights, and willingly extends the respect due to the office of a good prince into an affection for his person. Loyalty, in the heart and understanding of an Englishman, is a rational attachment to the guardian of the laws. Prejudices and passion have sometimes carried it to a criminal length; and whatever foreigners may imagine, we know that Englishmen have erred as much in a mistaken zeal for particular persons and families, as they ever did in defence of what they thought most dear and interesting to themselves. It naturally fills us with resentment to see such a temper insulted and abused."

The style of an exordium should be clear and correct. At first an audience are generally attentive to the speaker, and when they are not warmed with the discourse or subject, are more disposed to criticism. All appearance of art or inflated language must then be avoided; for in an introduction nothing hurts more than ostentation. On this account an appearance of modesty has always been thought requisite in an exordium.* Most men entertain too high an opinion of themselves to be pleased with those who assume any thing of an overbearing appearance; wherefore be cautious never to promise too much at first, for if your argument proves dull after you have raised expectation, the hearers will feel disappointment, and will consequently be displeased instead of conciliated. Every public speaker should bear in his mind the artful demeanor of the wise Ulysses in the contest with Ajax, as described in the 13th book of Ovid's Metamorphoses.....

..... "Donec Laertius heros
"Adstitit; atque oculos paulum tellure moratos

* "Atque commendatio tacite si nos infirmos & impares, &c.....Est enim naturalis favor pro laborantibus; & Judex religiosus libentur patronem audit quem justiciæ suæ minimum timet."....QUINCT. l. 4. c. 1.

" Sustulit ad proceres; expectatoque resolvit
" Ora sono: neque abest facundia gratia dictis,
" Si mea cum vestris valuisset vota, Pelasgi,
" Non foret ambiguus tanti certaminis hæres:
" Tuque tuis armis, nos te potirenur, Achille!"

..... " A murmur from the multitude,
" Or somewhat like a stifled shout ensued.....
" Till from his seat arose Laertes' son,
" Look'd down awhile, and paus'd ere he begun;
" Then to th' expecting audience rais'd his look,
" And not without prepar'd attention spoke:
" Soft was his tone, and sober was his face;
" Action his words, and words his action grace.
" If Heaven, great chiefs, had heard our common prayer,
" These arms had caus'd no quarrel for an heir,
" Still great Achilles had his own possess'd,
" And we with great Achilles had been bless'd."

Dryden.

In your introduction never anticipate any thing that would be more properly introduced afterwards; this takes away the grace of novelty, and the force of what should follow.

Lastly, The introduction should bear a proportion both in length and kind to the discourse. Dr. Blair remarks, that a long introduction before a short discourse is as improper as a large portico before a small house; it must also be proportionate in kind, for as a finely adorned portico before a mean building, so is a flowery introduction to a flat discourse. Learned men have generally found the greatest difficulty in making introductions; for it is not easy to be plain and simple without being somewhat dry and uninteresting.

The second part is the *narrative* or explication. Narrative is chiefly necessary for popular assemblies, and for the bar, to state those circumstances which ought to be well understood. In sermons the word explication is used; it serves the same purpose as the narration, and in these is justly reckoned among the most difficult parts of a discourse.

In narration all superfluous circumstances must be omitted, and the best way is to represent things in a picturesque manner. Of this we have an excellent example in Swift's Essay on the Fates of Clergymen; the style should be simple but elegant. In a sermon the same rule must be observed. The explication should be clear, concise, and correct; the language plain but elegant. You must observe what light the context throws upon your discourse, and consider in what it differs from similar subjects.

The third part of a discourse is the statement or *division* of the argument. This generally follows the narrative, though sometimes it as properly goes before it. Some critics have been of opinion that a formal division of orations is unnecessary and improper, as it checks the passions, and breaks the unity of a discourse; but, in truth, it is only a faulty division that breaks the unity: a proper division is not only consistent with unity, but even renders it more conspicuous. It also allows a resting-place to the mind, where it can reflect on what has been said, and look forward to what is to come: according to Quinctilian, it is like a man travelling upon a road which is marked with stones at every mile end; this makes his journey seem shorter than if he was always uncertain how far he had to go. It however depends upon the occasion, the subject, and the taste of the orator, whether any formal division should be proposed or not. In cases where it is adopted the following rules are recommended by writers on rhetoric....

1st. In a good discourse the heads should be distinct, and none of them included in another.

2dly. The divisions should be ranged in their natural order; you should first begin with the most simple, and then proceed to things of greater importance.

3dly. They should exhaust the subject, otherwise the division is imperfect. You must therefore consider into what parts or divisions the subject most naturally resolves itself.

4thly. The heads should be expressed in concise terms; you should avoid all circumlocutions. The setting forth of the main part of your subject in a concise manner enables the hearers to comprehend it more easily.

5thly. The heads ought not to be multiplied unnecessarily, as this enfeebles the discourse.

Fourth. The *argumentative* part is by far the most important, being really in itself the end and object for which every oration is framed. The ancient orators have established two divisions under this head; the one in which you adduce the proofs and evidence on your own side of the question; the other in which you meet and refute the objections of your adversary. Which of these ought to come first in an oration must depend upon circumstances. In general I should say that in an opening discourse, or in the first upon any question, as when a member introduces a motion in either house of parliament, he should first establish the proofs in his own favour, and then proceed to encounter whatever objections he might conceive likely to be urged against him. In a *reply*, on the contrary, he should first meet the objections of his adversary, and then proceed to establish his own argument.

To attempt to establish rules respecting this part of an oration, would be trifling with your understanding. The arguments must depend upon the nature of the case, and the genius of the orator. There are indeed no rules to produce a strong reasoner; this is beyond the reach of logic or of any other science; it must be the effect of nature and of study. The ancients, it is true, endeavoured to supply every deficiency of argument by common-place topics, such as I formerly mentioned, to be used according to the nature of the discourse; these were called *loci*, and hence orations were classed into the demonstrative, the deliberative, and the judicial. Under the first they considered all the qualities that could attend any person from his birth to his death, for which he could be praised or blamed. Under the second they considered the honesty, propriety,

&c. of an action. Under the third they arranged all arguments concerning the relations, accidents, and consequences of things. I am far, however, from thinking these sufficient for all the purposes of an orator, or that they can be suited to the circumstances of every subject. This method may produce declaimers, but can never form a good orator; they may, however, be consulted with advantage, especially by lawyers; and you will find them in Aristotle, Cicero in his book De Inventione, his Topica, the 2d De Oratore, and Quinctilian. Any person who inclines to see them in English may consult Dr. Ward's System of Oratory.

The arrangement of your arguments must also depend upon the subject, the audience and the object to be achieved, and must be altogether under the regulation of your own taste and judgment. You will pursue the analytical or synthetical method according to circumstances. In other respects the following instructions may be useful:

1st. When you prepare the argumentative part of your discourse, place yourself in the situation of a hearer, and consider what arguments would have the greatest effect in convincing yourself. As human nature is every where much the same, so it is most probable these arguments will have much the same effect on others.

2d. You must never rest satisfied with pleasing your audience; they may be pleased when they are persuaded there is not a sentence of truth in your oration. In this part therefore of the discourse the speaker should particularly labour to convince, and reserve the entertaining part for the peroration.

3dly. The topics of your discourse should never be blended in a confused manner; this is so evident that the mention of it is sufficient.

4thly. Your arguments should be so arranged as to support each other; if you are doubtful of your cause, and have but one argument of any strength, place that one in the front, and enlarge upon it, in order to prejudice your hearers in your favour; for if you begin with those that have but little or no force, they will imme-

diately conclude that your reasoning is weak and feeble; but if your subject is clear, and your case a good one, commence with those arguments that are more feeble, and make them grow in strength, or, in technical language, rise in a climax; if you have any circumstances which seem trifling, but which yet cannot be conveniently omitted, Cicero judiciously advises to put them in the middle, where they will be least observed; when your arguments are all weak and feeble, the best way is to take them in a mass, as they will be more strong than when they are separate; but if they are clear and convincing, it is best to take them separately, that each of them may appear in its clearest light, and have its full effect.

5thly. Never extend an argument to too great a length; this only burdens the memory without influencing the judgment; it takes from the *vis* and *acumen*, which is the best characteristic of talent; and rather let your hearers suppose that something is left to their own fancy and judgment, than that you have entirely exhausted the subject.

The last part of an oration is the *peroration* or conclusion. This, like all the others, will vary according to the subject, the circumstances, and the genius of the speaker. The best in general, the most useful, and at the same time most common, is a short and forcible recapitulation of the principal arguments, with the inference which the speaker intended to be deduced from them. Men of genius will however by no means confine themselves to this one description of peroration. The vivacity of their imaginations will, as frequently as the circumstances of the case, induce them to take a different course. If an appeal can in this part of the oration be made to the passions of the audience, it seldom fails of a happy effect. But the subject should completely authorize it, for nothing is more truly disgusting than affected pathos; and it should not be abruptly introduced, but should be a continuation of something of the same description which preceded. Bishop Sherlock is very happy in his perorations; and I do not

know a finer passage than that which is quoted by Bishop Lowth in his Grammar, and afterwards by Dr. Blair, as an example of the prosopopœia...."Go to your natural religion," &c.

Dr. Ogden has also displayed a happy talent in this as well as in every branch of the rhetorical art. I transcribe almost at random the conclusion of his thirteenth sermon on the Articles of the Christian Faith.

"Let this suffice. Embrace the offer of life; fly from the wrath to come. You know not the plan of infinite government, what the order of God's universe admits, what eternal wisdom counsels, or supreme rectitude requires. Say not within yourselves, If he desires that I should be happy, he can make me so. He can do every thing that is right and fit to be done; and nothing more. He desires you to be happy, and it is therefore he does so much, and, for any thing you know, all he can do, to effect it. He is your friend and your father: but, in this respect, like your parents upon earth; he can only lament over your calamities, if you resist his goodness, and are resolved to perish in spite of all the efforts of omnipotence.

"For your own sake, and for the sake of those who love you, not only on earth, but above, the blessed angels, the Holy Trinity, return to yourself, to a sound mind, to the exercise of piety, and the practice of all virtue: there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

I cannot however give you a finer instance of a spirited peroration, than the conclusion of Mr. Burke's address on the hustings at Bristol, when he declined the election in 1780, and with this I shall conclude my letter; only adding one observation,—that the short address from which it is extracted is one of the most precious specimens of eloquence that ancient or modern times have recorded....

"It has been usual for a candidate who declines, to take his leave by a letter to the sheriffs; but I received your trust in the face of day, and in the face of day I accept your dismission. I am not.....I am not at all

ashamed to look upon you; nor can my presence discompose the order of business here. I humbly and respectfully take my leave of the sheriffs, the candidates, and the electors, wishing heartily that the choice may be for the best, at a time which calls, if ever time did call, for the service that is not nominal. It is no plaything you are about. I tremble when I consider the trust I have presumed to ask. I confided perhaps too much in my intentions. They were really fair and upright; and I am bold to say, that I ask no ill thing for you, when, on parting from this place, I pray, that whoever you choose to succeed me, may resemble me exactly in all things, excepting my abilities to serve, and my fortune to please you."

LETTER XVII.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF ORATORY.....ELOQUENCE OF THE SENATE.....OF THE BAR.

MY DEAR JOHN,

ALL orations may be arranged under two divisions. 1st. Those which are precomposed, and delivered either from memory, or read aloud to the audience; and 2dly, those which are spoken on the occasion, with little of previous study, at least with respect to the style or language, and this kind of eloquence is what we call extempore.

We have reason to believe that the most finished orations of the ancients were precomposed, and committed to memory. We have the frank acknowledgment of Pliny the younger, that their ornamental eloquence, their panegyrics, come under this description; and we find from the same authority, that it was even common to read them, previous to their delivery, to a select company of friends, for the benefit of their criticisms. The confession of Cicero* that, he had by him a volume of Exordiums ready precomposed, from which he was accustomed to select, leads me to suspect that many of his orations were in the same predicament. If I am not mistaken, the pleadings before the French parliament were always precomposed, and read by the advocates. The form of their trials, in which the evidence was all reduced to writing, and taken before notaries previous to the pleading before the court, entirely favoured this kind of eloquence. The French preachers also com-

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* Ad Atticum, lib. xvi. ess. 6.

mitted their sermons to memory; and I have been assured that in the national assembly, and the convention, many, even of the first orators, either read their speeches or delivered them from memory.

A modern writer (Mr. Hume) has instituted a comparison between ancient and modern eloquence, infinitely indeed to the disadvantage of the latter. I suspect he was scarcely sufficient master of the languages to read the ancients with that kind of relish that results from familiarity, and therefore incautiously took their praises at second hand; and I am also inclined to believe that he had not heard the best effusions of our senatorial oratory. That he had never stood before the glorious torrent of Lord Chatham's eloquence, or witnessed the varied and enchanting flow of Mr. Burke's incomparable genius.

Granting however for the present Mr. Hume's conclusion to be just, there are many reasons why the exertions of ancient genius should be almost exclusively directed to oratory. The art of printing had not given that facility to the diffusion of sentiment, which at present exists. It was by oral effusions alone that the ancients could hope to arrive at fame and distinction. Their philosophers taught in this manner, and their statesmen openly deliberated in public assemblies. Even the history of Herodotus was recited at the Olympic games. The occasions too for the employment of eloquence were more frequent than with us. Every citizen of the free states of antiquity might address the assembly of the people upon any public occasion. The law was not a laborious study exclusively confined to those who are educated to the profession; and, as justice was administered generally on the vague and simple principles of natural equity, not according to forms, statutes, and precedents, any man might in a little time become completely acquainted with all that was necessary to accomplish him for a pleader. The science of the ancients too was neither extensive nor profound, so that genius was not distracted by a variety of pursuits. From all these

circumstances we cannot wonder that oratory was cultivated in the ancient world with ardour and success.

But indeed I cannot in honesty and candour subscribe to the truth of Mr. Hume's position, that the ancients were every thing, and that we are nothing in this art. Whether the ancients excelled or not in extempore speaking, this at least we know, that the specimens of their eloquence which have been transmitted to us are studied compositions. Now to compare these with any unpremeditated effusion which we may happen to hear in the British senate, is scarcely fair; and yet I declare I have heard speeches there which would not lose in a comparison with the best of Cicero or Demosthenes. The vehement and impressive oratory of Mr. Fox, the wit and pathos of Mr. Sheridan; and the choice and polished elocution of Mr. Pitt, might vie with any thing to be found in these celebrated models of eloquence.

But we have even a fairer and more certain criterion. Let any unprejudiced critic compare those specimens which the masters of eloquence among ourselves have condescended to publish, with the productions of the ancients, and let him determine for himself. I protest I find more genius and fancy, more knowledge of human nature, and a far greater proportion of wit, in the published speeches of Mr. Burke, than in any of the works of the ancient orators; and if chaste and correct eloquence is what he requires, I can only advise him to hear the present Chancellor of the Exchequer,* even when he speaks without premeditation; or to peruse a speech which was published some years ago by himself, or some of his friends, on the abolition of the slave trade.

I am not wishing to depreciate the ancients, who certainly have cultivated eloquence with a success which could scarcely have been expected at so early a period; but I cannot endure that the merit of the moderns should be wantonly underrated, through a blind veneration for

* This was written during Mr. Pitt's administration.

the excellent of former times. Rely upon it, there is no theatre more favourable for the exertions of eloquence than a British house of commons, nor any, where it has been more successfully studied or employed.

The occasions, as I have just mentioned, were more frequent, for the exertion of eloquence, among the ancients than among ourselves. Except a particular opportunity which a public meeting of the people may casually present, the only theatres of oratory are the parliament, the bar, and the pulpit. In the two former the orations are chiefly, if not altogether, extempore. In the latter the practice is at present almost exclusively confined to studied compositions.

In the remainder of this letter I shall endeavour to propose a few rules for parliamentary eloquence, and I shall also briefly consider the eloquence of the bar, which will include all that is to be offered on the subject of extempore oratory.

1st. I should be sorry to discourage any young man of genius from attempting to speak in parliament; but to use a parliamentary phrase, I would caution him against "committing himself" too soon. A laugh once raised against a modest man perhaps disarms him for ever. Yet a young member must not be too fastidious. Mr. Gibbon, when he first entered the house of commons undoubtedly intended to speak; and I cannot doubt but if he could have subdued the first impulse of modesty, he would have spoken incomparably; but the fact was, that waiting too long for a fit occasion to display his talents, he sunk into utter indolence or despair; and thus the senate of Great Britain was deprived of a genius, which would probably have been its brightest ornament. Dr. Johnson (who was indeed an older man) felt more confidence in himself, and regretted that Lord North, at the solicitation of Mr. Thrale, had not afforded him an opportunity of displaying his talents. I have not a doubt but he would have acquitted himself admirably; for the style of Dr. Johnson in conversation was as pointed, and nearly as correct as in his publica-

tions. Lord Chesterfield, who knew mankind, and the houses of parliament in particular, better than most men, advises his son to *feel his way;* to make short speeches at first, and principally in committees, where formal speeches are not expected; and thus to acquire confidence by degrees, before he launched out on any great or momentous occasion.

2dly. A young member of parliament should endeavour to make himself well acquainted with every subject which is likely to come under discussion; and if his mind is full upon the question, it is very likely he will feel a momentary impulse to enter into the debate, especially if any pause should take place. At all events, by studying diligently the different topics of debate, he enables himself to discharge his duty properly if he gives only a silent vote, and is accomplishing his mind for future occasions.

3dly. It is practice that makes a fluent orator. Practice cannot give genius, it is true; but (if I may be allowed a vulgarism) there is a ready *knack*, both of writing and speaking, which men of very moderate talents often and easily acquire. Debating societies have their disadvantages, and there are two in particular against which young men ought to be guarded. They are apt to generate a love of disputing, the most disagreeable quality, without exception, with which a young man can enter society. The applause also which superficial speakers receive there, is apt to generate a belief that a command of words is the only necessary accomplishment. Otherwise by affording an opportunity of practice, debating societies certainly contribute more than any means I know of towards fluency and readiness, which are no mean qualifications in an orator. But it is only to a mind which is well stocked with useful knowledge that they will afford this improvement. The person who goes ignorant into one of these seminaries, unless he compensates by ardent study for his former deficiencies, will come out, under the most favourable circumstances, only a noisy and fluent dunce.

4thly. Any man before he rises to speak in a popular assembly should have formed a complete plan of his intended discourse; whether in speaking he adopts divisions or not, he will find his memory greatly assisted by dividing in his mind his intended harangue into its several parts, and methodically arranging them. I have seen the first of our parliamentary orators have in their hands little memorandums, which I could perceive contained the heads of their discourses. In a reply the proper arrangement is always to follow the course of your adversary's argument; and hence those speakers who are not great masters of method and arrangement, often shine more in a reply than in an opening speech. I am far from advising that you should study the words or phrases you are to employ before-hand, this would only serve to confuse and embarrass you. The language of an orator must be strictly *his own*, such as in general he would employ upon ordinary occasions, but as select as the rapidity of utterance will allow.

5thly. In the course of an oration never hesitate about the choice of a word. Take that which presents itself rather than look for terms more uncommon and refined; for if the mind is once diverted from the matter to the words, your discourse will be deranged, and fail in a lucid order, which is a greater deficiency than an indifferent style; and it is also probable that even your enunciation will be perplexed and stammering.

6thly. From the two preceding rules you will easily perceive of what immense importance it is to an orator to accustom himself even in common conversation to polished language, and a very nice choice of expression. He must never permit himself to use a vulgarism on the most common occasion, but must carefully eradicate all such noxious weeds from his vocabulary. A little attention to this chastity and correctness of expression will soon render it easy and habitual. No other words but the best will present themselves to your mind; and on the contrary, I am convinced that unless a man has previously cleared his usual dialect from low and vicious expressions, they will obtrude themselves whenever he

speaks in public, whatever may be his caution and attention.

In treating thus of extempore oratory, as far as applies to the eloquence of the senate, I have anticipated much of what I should otherwise have had to advance on that of the bar, for the same rules will apply to both, and I shall only have to add one or two remarks exclusively applicable to the latter.

I am far from agreeing with Mr. Hume and Dr. Blair, that the English bar affords not a fine theatre for oratory. They certainly, in forming this conclusion, reasoned under some disadvantage; for they had only before their view the Scottish bar, where the trial by jury is allowed only in criminal cases. The observation of Dr. Blair is therefore perfectly just in this case. "Speakers at the bar," says he, "address themselves to one or a few judges, and those too, persons generally of age, gravity, and authority of character. There they have not those advantages which a mixed and numerous assembly affords for employing all the arts of speech." This is strictly true from the view which presented itself to this writer; but in England, where in three of the principal courts, as well as in all the inferior judicatures of the kingdom, almost every cause is tried by a jury of twelve men, selected by ballot, surely the very finest opportunity for the display of oratory is afforded, and especially as the advocate addresses them under peculiar advantages, with some ideas of superior learning and superior dignity.

The English advocate too has conducted the cause from its commencement, and examined the evidence; he is therefore not only made master of the whole argument, but, if possessed of feeling, must have acquired some warmth and ardour in the cause. Grant that he is in some degree confined by the precision of our laws, still it is matter of fact on which he has principally to address a jury, and the less of technical language he mingles in it the greater will be its effect. It would indeed perhaps be better if oratory had less influence than it is known to have in our courts of justice. It is

somewhat checked by the sedate character of the people of England, and by the feeling of jurymen that they are bound by their oaths; but still it is found to be of so much intrinsic consequence, that the barrister who possesses this talent finds that it infallibly conducts to fame and fortune.

1st. The most important rule that I can lay down to the practitioner at the bar, is to make himself perfect master of the science of the law. Without this he can never speak with courage and confidence; and he will also be in danger of incurring the ridicule of his adversary, and perhaps the contempt of the court. A knowledge of the law will also supply the means of eloquence, or at least a substitute for it; for a sound lawyer is always heard with attention, whether he is what is called eloquent or not.

2d. The next requisite is a perfect knowledge of the cause in which he is engaged. This is indeed a duty he owes not less to his client than to his own reputation, for he actually defrauds the man from whom he receives a fee, unless he exerts himself to the very utmost of his abilities.

3dly. Though warmth and vehemence may be occasionally admitted, and sometimes required, yet a counsel will commonly have most weight with a jury, who addresses them as rational beings, and *seems* at least to labour to convince their judgment. In the beginning of his oration he should always appear cool and temperate, but always in earnest, otherwise they will have less confidence in his assertions.

The plan and order which I laid down in my last letter is strictly applicable to judicial oratory, and every address to a jury must consist of; 1st, an exordium, in which he must endeavour to conciliate their favour; 2d, a statement of facts or narrative, in which the pleader recapitulates or anticipates the principal parts of the evidence; 3dly, it will be in general better and clearer to a jury, if he points out the proper divisions of his argument, as more of method is expected from a pleader.

than in a mere declamatory address; 4thly, the argumentative part is indispensable, that being the peculiar business of an advocate; 5thly, the peroration or conclusion should be always remarkably clear and lucid, and if the subject admits of the pathetic, this is the part in which it will commonly be introduced to the greatest advantage.

LETTER XVIII.

RISE AND PROGRESS OF ELOQUENCE.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IT would be a very pleasing exercise to trace the history of eloquence from its first rude origin through the various ramifications of human genius; to mark the powers, the character of the different men in the different ages of society, who have successfully employed this fascinating art. It would be pleasing even to pursue the science as long as the records of civilized man permit; and to trace the progress of oratory from Pericles to Pitt. But our materials for such a critical investigation are very few. The best effusions of oratory are Ἔπεα πτερόεντα (winged words). Unfortunately for us they are not

"Congeal'd in northern air."

Not only we lose the music, the cadence, the action with which they were graced, but even the substance of very few of these productions are transmitted to us. Of the orations of Demosthenes, a very small number have outlived the depredations of time. Cicero, who for some years spoke almost daily in public, and who was the most diligent of men, has committed to writing a very small proportion of his numerous orations; even the eloquence of our own great and distinguished orators, St. John, Pulteney, Pitt, Fox, and Sheridan, are only to be traced in those meagre and imperfect registers, the volumes of Parliamentary Debates, in which you are presented rather with the language of an illiterate reporter, than with that of the accomplished statesman and orator, whose speech he undertakes to detail.

That oratory was not only practised, but studied with considerable effect from almost the earliest periods, is evident from the specimens which stand recorded almost as soon as language became stationary in writing. The oratory of the Hebrews is of a peculiar kind, short and sententious, like their poetry. But in the Book of Job, in the speeches of Moses and of Samuel, we have some beautiful examples of the sublime and the pathetic in oratory. The speeches in Homer would be admired even if they were not in measure; and I am inclined to the opinion that the Iliad is not less indebted for its celebrity to the eloquence than to the poetry it contains. This, it will be said, was the work of the poet only, and is neither to be ascribed to the characters from whose mouths it is supposed to issue, nor to the period in which they existed. This I will readily grant; but as the Iliad is universally acknowledged to be a minor, or dramatic representation of the age at least in which the poet lived, two inferences will necessarily follow..... That it was *then* customary to address public assemblies in the manner of the heroes of Homer; and that no inconsiderable progress must have been made in eloquence as an art. In truth, I do not know any production that a young rhetorician may study with more profit than the oratorical parts of Homer, and particularly the debate of the contending chieftains in the first book of the Iliad.

From the time of Homer to that of Pericles, we have however nothing like a regular and authentic oration on record. That the eloquence of Pericles was unrivalled we cannot doubt, for it is asserted that he governed Athens (and he governed it almost despotically) not less by his eloquence, than by his policy and power. Yet we dare not pronounce that the charming specimens of the eloquence of this great man to be found in Thucydides are genuine. I apprehend them myself to be the fabrication of the historian: for they carry with them decidedly the marks of his peculiar style.

But though we have not any oratorical productions of this period before us, we know that immediately af-

ter the time of Pericles, the art of oratory was publicly professed and taught. It was reduced to a method almost mechanical. For the *topics* or *common places*, which I have so frequently mentioned, were introduced at this period; and these masters in rhetoric pretended to be able to make any person an orator by pursuing a certain course of study. Gorgias of Leontium accumulated an immense fortune by teaching rhetoric, but we have only a short fragment of his preserved by Hermogenes. It would be unfair, from so slight a specimen, to decide on an author's character; but as far as we may judge from it, his reputation was higher than his merits.

About the same period, it appears, there arose at Athens a set of men, who, having applied themselves to oratory, made a profession of it as public pleaders or orators. Lysias was one of these, and appears to have been a lawyer by profession, though some have asserted that he only composed orations for those who were practising lawyers. His eloquence is therefore almost exclusively forensic. Thirty-four of his orations are transmitted to us; they are acute, clear and methodical; no bad models for a practitioner at the bar, if we did not enjoy the advantage of hearing better almost every day in Westminster-hall.

Isocrates, of whose orations there are twenty-one extant, was somewhat posterior to Lysias. He was a professed rhetorician; and his productions are indeed rather to be considered as essays than orations. When I read them as a young man I was delighted with them, they abound so much in sentiment and moral observation. In more mature age, however, I found the latter exceedingly trite, and the whole too studied and artificial. The style appears, as far as we are judges of style in a dead language, to be very chaste, though not animated. Isocrates is said to have been the first who studied a musical cadence, and has brought it to great perfection. He was so nice in this particular, that he spent no less than ten years in composing one oration, still extant, the Panegyric. Cicero was a great admirer of Isocrates, and seems to have imitated him.

Isæus (ten of whose orations are still extant) was master to Demosthenes, who, by the assistance of a surprising genius, united with indefatigable labour and industry, made so much advantage of his precepts, that he has always been esteemed, by the best judges, the first of Grecian orators. I need not repeat to you the common tale, that he retired into caves, that he might study without being disturbed, and that he kept pebbles in his mouth to correct a defect in his speech. He is said also to have hung a naked sword over his shoulders, to prevent him from using an ungraceful motion, to which he had habituated himself. From this we learn how much natural disadvantages may be balanced by diligent application and study; and it is a proof also how ardently oratory was studied at this period in the Grecian republics.

I never did enter into the very exaggerated praises which have been bestowed upon Demosthenes, and which have exalted him into something more than a man. Yet it would be uncandid and unjust not to confess that in his person oratory was carried to a very high degree of perfection, especially when we consider the early period at which he flourished. The power which he attained, and the situation which he occupied in the state of Athens, prove him to have been possessed of no uncommon force in persuading and guiding a popular assembly. But it is fortunate that we have still superior evidence to which to resort; we have his own written orations. They are to be criticised as studied compositions, since they are not pretended to have been taken down as he spoke them, but were made public by himself. Demosthenes, therefore, arguing from the specimens he has left us, must be regarded as a close and correct reasoner, master of a flowing, elegant, and harmonious style, as far as we are judges of these qualities in a dead language; and with occasionally a very fine and brilliant thought, though in this he is inferior to many of the moderns, and particularly to Mr. Burke. He had but little of wit, though he occasionally affects it, particularly in the celebrated oration against Æs-

chines. One excellence however I cannot too much commend in Demosthenes, nor can I in this respect too strongly recommend his example to young orators. His arguments all tend to a single point, and are concentrated, like the dispersed rays of light when reflected from a concave mirror, so as to bear altogether with their united force upon the object he has in view. He never excurses into too large a field, never loses sight of his subject. This, I think, was the characteristic excellence of Mr. Fox's oratory. Other speakers greatly excelled Mr. Fox in choice of words, in voice, address and manner; but no man equalled him in the selection, force, and happy arrangement of his arguments.

Cicero, who is the only orator of antiquity who will bear a comparison with Demosthenes, and who perhaps possessed more genius, at least more imagination, was more diffuse, and consequently feebler than his Grecian rival. I think Quinctilian, in his celebrated comparison between Cicero and Demosthenes, says, "to the one nothing can be added, from the other nothing can be taken away." The latter character, which applies strictly to Demosthenes, you will easily perceive implies more judgment in him, and speaks him the more forcible orator; such indeed he must have been, though the beauties of Cicero, when separately considered, will perhaps attract the highest admiration.

Though so accomplished an orator, Demosthenes was certainly a very bad general, and not a much better politician. He had moreover the misfortune never to be obeyed by his versatile countrymen but when he happened to give bad advice; and the jarring and inconsistent councils of a discordant republic, soon gave way before the persevering and steady policy of Philip of Macedon. With Demosthenes, therefore, fell the liberties of his country, and with him perished the eloquence of Greece. Those who succeeded were a race of sophists, and pedantic rhetoricians, who taught the art merely in the schools, and never introduced it (indeed they never had an opportunity after their country was enslaved) upon great or public questions.

Oratory was however studied as a fine art, under these masters, long after it ceased to be useful in Greece; and even the Romans, when they became civilized, and applied to literature, regarded rhetoric as one of the most important lessons to which they could attend under their more polished teachers of Greece.

There never was a finer field for eloquence than was opened at Rome. Her government was popular; her judicature popular. With oratory their statesmen influenced the senate; with a public harangue their generals led on their armies to battle and to conquest. I cannot therefore believe, with the French critics and Dr. Blair, that they were greatly inferior in this art to their Grecian rivals.

The Romans, it is true, were a military nation; but though this circumstance is but little favourable to the cultivation of the more profound sciences, can a nobler scope be afforded for that manly and energetic eloquence, which great projects and great undertakings naturally dictate? It might want something of that elegance and polish which Greece, where every pleasing and ornamental art was known to flourish, could boast. Their manner of speaking might be, to use the words of Cicero, somewhat "asperum et horridum;" but can it be believed that it was deficient in dignity, and in vigour? I am not prepared therefore to subscribe to the opinion that Cicero was the only orator that Rome could boast. I shall not quote as authentic documents, the orations which are found in Livy; but if we may judge from the effects, the orations of the Gracchi must have been exceedingly powerful. Scipio appears to have been not less of an orator than a soldier. The two Cato's might not be polished speakers, but they certainly commanded attention in the senate. With respect to Cæsar, Hortensius, and even Anthony, we have the testimony of Cicero himself, and after such an authority we have no right to think meanly of their talents.

After the accession of Augustus, there was scarcely any thing deserving of the name of eloquence in that poor shadow of popular authority, which was called the

senate of Rome. The few specimens which are extant, evince that the history of Rome, under the emperors, consisted chiefly of studied panegyrics, or orations on state occasions, like the declamations of the French academy, which nobody reads. They might be indeed sufficiently ornamented and polished; but they want interest, because we know they were mere artificial compositions, without a relation to any great undertaking or transaction of public life. The best specimen extant of these, is the panegyric of the younger Pliny on the Emperor Trajan.

We have also some examples extant of that kind of eloquence which was taught in the schools of rhetoric, particularly the Controversiæ, as they are called, of Seneca the rhetorician, the father of the famous philosopher of that name. They are altogether artificial, full of antitheses and studied ornament. Yet much as I admire the genius of Dr. Johnson, whoever looks into these orations, will find that our great writer was not unacquainted with the Controversiæ of Seneca.

After the preaching of christianity a new style of oratory was introduced, of the highest importance as to the subject, but less animated than the eloquence of debate, because of a more didactic nature. The Epistles of Paul, however, and even some of the later Fathers, contain specimens of eloquence superior to any, I will affirm, to be found in the compositions of either Cicero or Demosthenes.

A late French writer, the unfortunate Marquis de Condorcet, in a posthumous work, affects to speak lightly of the writings of the Fathers. His remarks, however, only prove his ignorance, and shew that, like the rest of his superficial and contemptible sect, he had the effrontery to censure writings that he never read. They shew that he has never perused the sweet and flowing orations of Chrysostom;* the animated addresses of Gregory Nazianzen; the unequal, but sometimes sub-

* The golden-mouthed.

lime compositions of St. Augustine; the strong and nervous periods of Tertullian; and of Lactantius, who abounds in all the learning of the times, and in every beauty of composition. The criticisms even of Dr. Blair, on these writers, prove that he was not much more conversant with them than Condorcet himself. It is, perhaps, sufficient to say, that the most eloquent preacher of the present times confessedly formed his style altogether on that of the ancient Fathers.

The only countries in modern Europe where we can expect to find eloquence cultivated are France and England. The French have naturally a sprightly genius, and a taste, though not a correct one, for the polite arts. The English have had a great advantage, both from their genius and the nature of their government; they have both however produced very great men in many different professions, and some orators who might justly contend with either Demosthenes or Cicero.

In England, however, as well as in Greece and Rome, the highest efforts of eloquence seem confined to the great assembly of the nation. There are, no doubt, some good speakers who plead at the bar, but none of their orations are transmitted to posterity, while we read those of the ancients with pleasure. The sermons of the English writers are inferior to none in good sense and reasoning, but they appear in general, deficient in spirit and animation.

In the writings of Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Masillon, we see a much higher kind of eloquence aimed at than by any English preacher; but these are as lamentably deficient in matter as the English are in style; and, if we except a few sermons of Masillon, there are not many of them of much value.

I shall conclude this letter with a short comparison between two of the most finished orators that ever graced the British or any other senate. It was written several years ago, when I was in the habit of attending the debates of the house of commons, and was originally published in a periodical publication, in the conducting of which I had some share.

" Both Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox are strictly what may be termed business speakers. They argue like men of business, rather with a view of influencing their hearers, than of conciliating applause to themselves. They vary less from the question, and indulge their imaginations less than Mr. Burke or Mr. Sheridan; and the superior force of their eloquence is the best panegyric on this species of oratory. Though agreeing in this one essential, the oratory of these great men is however in a variety of circumstances materially different. A brief comparison, therefore, of their excellencies and defects, whether instructive or not, cannot, I think, fail to prove entertaining, at least to country readers.

" The first obvious difference which excited my attention was, that the one is the most elegant, the other the most impassioned speaker I have ever heard. The one carries the understanding along with him, and while we are the captives of his ingenuity, we imagine we are following the light of our own reason; the other leads us no less forcibly by our passions; and if Mr. Pitt addresses the head, every sentence of Mr. Fox demonstrates his influence over the heart. The one interests, the other convinces. The one conducts you over a pleasant champaign and luxuriant meadow; the other forces you along with him, be the ground ever so uneven, be the path ever so rough and interrupted. It is something extraordinary that the younger man should be distinguished by the greater extent and variety of his knowledge—but such undoubtedly appears to be the fact; and to account for it, we perhaps must have recourse to the different education and habits of the two orators. Thus Mr. Pitt is diffuse, and surprises by the multitude of his ideas, and by the variety of lights in which he exhibits the subject. Mr. Fox, on the other hand, is concise and energetic; his proofs are arranged to the utmost advantage, and all of them tend immediately to the very point: he introduces but few arguments, few ideas, but these are generally the very strongest, and placed in the strongest light. In short, it is impossible to hear the two speakers without recollecting the ob-

servation of Quinctilian in his celebrated parallel between Cicero and Demosthenes: "To the one, nothing can be added; from the other, nothing can be taken away." But if it be granted, that from indolence, from the variety of his avocations, or perhaps from not possessing the means, Mr. Fox appears deficient of information on any occasion, what he wants in knowledge, he amply compensates for in ingenuity. He catches almost instantaneously the slightest hint, and an argument which appears of no force when treated by a minor speaker, in his hands appears both interesting and important. Mr. Pitt generally comes well prepared to speak upon the business of the day: to Mr. Fox, preparation seems unnecessary, since even from the casual intimation of his adversaries, he is able to produce matter sufficient, either for attack or defence.

"I have intimated that neither of them are very florid speakers; and I cannot help thinking it rather an extraordinary circumstance, in Mr. Pitt particularly, that though fresh from the schools, we find *in* his speeches no classical allusions, no embellishments from ancient literature, no pomp of erudition; he seldom quotes, but rather produces the ideas of other men in his own words, contrary to the fashionable practice of cloathing our own thoughts in the peculiar phraseology of books. In point of wit, I do not think either of them deficient, though they are prudent in the use of it. Mr. Fox seldom descends from the earnestness and dignity of his declamation to light or trivial remarks; and yet Mr. Pitt's oratory is not disgraced by that elegant irony, that polished ridicule, in which he sometimes indulges himself and his hearers. The candid of all parties agree in allowing to Mr. Pitt the happiest choice of words that graces any senator in either house; but I confess I was surprized to find the editor of Bellendenenus attribute, in unqualified terms, this excellence to Mr. Fox. The style of Mr. Pitt is in general so correct, that the auditor is almost induced to fancy he hears the studied composition of some masterly writer. The language of Mr. Fox is indeed generally forcible and expressive, but *it*

is by no means so elegant, select, and harmonious, as that of his more finished rival. If fluency be a mark of genius, in this too Mr. Pitt has the advantage. His words flow rapidly, but easily, without difficulty or hesitation; on the contrary, Mr. Fox frequently hesitates, sometimes recals his words, and seems dubious which to make choice of; and though a very rapid speaker, his rapidity appears rather the effect of passion than imagination. With respect to manner, Mr. Pitt at first appears to have greatly the advantage; but Mr. Fox compensates in vivacity for his want of elegance, and though less graceful, is perhaps more interesting than Mr. Pitt. Mr. Pitt's voice is a full tenor, and his modulation is harmonious. Mr. Fox's is a treble, and his enunciation is affected by an occasional lisp. He soon teaches us, however, to forget these defects. His is both the language and the expression of nature, and without gratifying the eye, or charming the ear of his auditors, he commands their affections.

"Such appears to me to be the general character of each of these distinguished speakers. I have seen each of them occasionally bear away the palm from his competitor, and I have observed each fall greatly below the standard of his own merit, when defending a bad cause; a decisive proof that ingenuity and command of words will not alone form an orator, but that there must be a good foundation of truth and argument; or the most splendid harangue is but blossom without fruit; a mere shadow of eloquence without substance or effect."

LETTER XIX.

ELOQUENCE OF THE PULPIT.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN this country there is only one department of eloquence which admits of a precomposed discourse, and that is the eloquence of the pulpit. I have formerly remarked that we have reason to believe the ancients frequently, if not generally, composed their public orations before-hand, and recited them either from memory or from notes; and all those orations which were pronounced in the rhetorical schools, either as exercises, or displays of talent, were composed with great study and care. I have observed that the French advocates, before the Revolution, were also in the habit of committing all their pleadings to writing. But in our senate, and at our bar, where skilful debaters are of more value and weight than mere declaimers, where argument has more force than ornament, such a practice would be ridiculed as formal and pedantic.

The practice therefore of precomposing a popular address, is with us confined almost exclusively to the pulpit. The principles which have been already advanced on the subject of didactic composition, and also relative to the parts of a discourse, will almost all apply to what is called a Sermon, which you see literally means a discourse, from the Latin *Sermo*.

Whatever there is peculiar to this form of composition will appear further, if we take a short view of the origin and progress of pulpit eloquence.

In the primitive church, from the earliest period, a custom prevailed, which may indeed be ultimately traced to the Jewish, though the time of its introduction into the latter is not clearly ascertained. One of the

most distinguished members of the congregation (usually the bishop or presbyter) read a portion of scripture, selected for the service of the day, and proceeded with a general explanation or exposition of what had been read, concluding with a practical exhortation. These exhortations were brief and unadorned, and were sometimes followed by further expositions of Scripture from others of the society, who professed to speak under the influence of the Holy Spirit.*

It is probable that what at first consisted of a few short, and perhaps unconnected sentences, would gradually, and by those who possessed fluency of thought, and facility of expression, be made to assume a more regular form. Origen (who lived in the beginning of the third century,) was the first who introduced long explanatory discourses into Christian assemblies; and preaching began in his time to be formed upon the nice model of Grecian eloquence. Sometimes two or three sermons were preached in the same congregation by the presbyters and bishops in succession. Many of these discourses were extempore, but many were also precomposed. The sermons on these occasions were necessarily short, as the time allotted for public worship was only two hours. It was probably upon some of these occasions that the short sermons of St. Augustin were composed, many of which may be pronounced distinctly in eight minutes, and some in less. Those of Chrysostom are however much longer, and some of them are evidently laboured compositions. As the institution of preaching commenced in the explication of Scripture, it still retained, through many revolutions of the public taste, some respect to its origin; and, with a few exceptions, a portion of the sacred writings always constituted the basis of the discourse, though latterly it was reduced almost to the form of a motto, which had frequently little connexion with the principal subject; and hence have originated our modern *Essay* Sermons.

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* Gregory's History of the Christian Church, Cent. 1.

During the dark ages, from the ignorance of the clergy, preaching was almost laid aside. After the Reformation it was chiefly extempore; but in England many complaints were made of those who were licensed to preach, I presume on account of the doctrines they advanced; and to enable them to justify themselves, many of the clergy began to write and read their sermons. The ease which this practice afforded, and the correctness it induced, has continued it in the church of England ever since.

This short view of the origin and progress of this species of eloquence will easily furnish us with the precise rules which are exclusively applicable to it.

That sermon is most useful and most agreeable to the nature of the institution which serves to elucidate the Holy Scriptures, and to clear away the difficulties which may occur to common readers. A sermon however ought always to have a practical tendency; and though explanatory of Scripture, the minuteness of philological or metaphysical speculations ought to be carefully avoided. Discourses which enter deeply into difficult doctrinal points are seldom of much use, and are fitter for the closet than for a public assembly. Sermons ought to be calculated to interest and engage as well as to instruct. "Propose one point in a discourse (says Mr. Paley) and stick to it; a hearer never carries away more than one impression." Let one virtue be recommended, or one doctrinal point be explained; it is impossible to condense the whole duties of a man, or the whole system of Christian doctrine into a single sermon.

A sermon should never wander from the text; and those are the best which follow exactly the natural division of the text; but this cannot always be done, particularly when the text is short, or contains one single proposition. A few easy and natural divisions will assist the memory, but many subdivisions perplex and confuse it; the exordium should be always natural and easy, not affected, nor yet trite, and directly leading to the object of the discourse. The conclusion should be

animated, and skilfully adapted to interest and awaken the feelings of the audience. It should therefore be always practical, and consist of an exhortation to make a right use of the doctrine which has been detailed, or to profit by the example which has been exhibited.

The style of sermons should be clear and plain. It should neither admit of low cant, nor vulgar phraseology; nor yet of difficult or foreign words, such as Latinisms, or technical phrases of any kind, not even those appropriate to divinity as a science. Rhetorical flourishes, or metaphysical expressions, are of little use. As Mr. Paley remarks, "they cost the writer much trouble, and produce small advantage to the hearer." Above all faults of style the exclamation ought to be avoided: it is always frigid, and can scarcely fail to offend a sensible ear.

The delivery of a sermon should correspond with what I have just uttered with respect to the style. It should correspond with the gravity and the dignity of the character which is assumed by the preacher. Those who attempt to *act* their sermons, as Dr. Warburton expresses it, degrade themselves into buffoons. That violence and inequality of enunciation, which sometimes becomes a player, as expressive of the stronger passions he represents, is offensive and improper in a teacher. Nor less disgusting is the attempt to speak in a kind of recitative, begging, pathetic tone, without at all adapting the voice to the nature of the subject. Whoever employs these poor devices, will indeed excite the pity of the well-informed part of his audience....but it will be for the preacher himself.

An easy, temperate, and harmonious elocution (with some regard to emphasis, particularly where a peculiar phrase requires that it should be impressed upon the mind) will always be more generally pleasing, than any kind of affectation. Few can excel in the higher requisites of oratory; few can become orators; but all may be correct and agreeable speakers (at least with few exceptions,) if they will not be too ambitious for distinction.

It has been debated, whether sermons may be most advantageously delivered from written notes, memory, or perfectly extempore. Dr. Beattie decides in favour of written sermons. Indeed there is scarcely any extempore discourse which is not too diffuse for the time usually allotted for the pulpit, that might not in fact be comprised in much fewer words, and which does not abound in impertinencies, tautologies, or solecisms. Yet a good extempore discourse has more effect in a common audience than a written one. A practice which has been much exclaimed against, but I think without reason, is that of preaching from printed sermons. If it does not beget habits of indolence in young clergymen, and is only the effect of modesty at their first entrance into public life, it is rather commendable than otherwise; but they should be cautioned when they do pilfer, rather to take from approved writers, than from obscure, or old authors, as is frequently done to escape detection; and it may be observed, that he who is unqualified to compose is commonly unfitted to select.

The style of the French writers I do not, in general, admire; they are, it is true, animated, while the English are rational and full of argument; but both these should be united to form a perfect preacher. The French have but few thoughts, and these placed in a variety of lights, which renders them sometimes feeble, but they are, perhaps, more warm and persuasive. There are some protestant preachers of the French, and particularly Saurin, who may be read with advantage. Amongst their popish divines, Bourdaloue is the most admired in France, but he is sometimes dull and verbose. Flechier is more ornamental; but the most distinguished is Masillon, Bishop of Clermont, who is really an elegant and nervous writer, and one who well understood the human heart.

In England, before the Restoration, the preachers were much addicted to scholastic and casuistical theology, and abounded in divisions. After the Restoration they became more correct and rational; but the puritans still retained something of the old style, united with a

considerable share of enthusiasm. The opposition between them caused those of the establishment to run into the other extreme, and the majority of them became mere moral and insipid preachers.

There is however a great number of excellent sermons in our language. Among the old authors I prefer Jeremy Taylor. He is classical, pathetic, and, for the time he lived in, elegant in his style. English preaching was, however, but in its infancy at that period: he admits, therefore, many thoughts and allusions into his discourses, which would excite a stare, if not a smile, in a modern audience; and if any divine should wish to adopt them, he must have some confidence in his own taste, and some expertness in the art of abridging. Dr. Barrow possessed a more varied stock of learning than perhaps any divine of our church. He has written on almost every subject of divinity or ethics; and I know few books to which I would rather choose to refer the student of theology, than to his sermons on the Christian Faith. Though his genius was mathematical, I confess there appears rather a want of method in some of his discourses. His style is in general plain and chaste. His periods are not full, but run smoothly from the tongue; and his language, for the most part, preserves one even tenor. He is a great magazine of sentiment and information, and may be resorted to by young preachers, with great advantage.

Dr. Tillotson's sermons have been admired. They are however, in general, too polemical, and the language is too loose and unharmonious. It has few well-turned periods, and is sometimes as slovenly as common conversation. The sermons of this good and learned man contain, however, some passages exquisitely beautiful.

I can, I confess, read South with more pleasure than the last mentioned author, though I do not pretend to apologize for his buffoonery. He is keen, pointed, sarcastic. He is a great judge of human nature, which he does not always view in the most favourable light. He is always animated, keeps alive our attention by the energy of his arguments, the acuteness of his wit, and the terse-

ness and compression of his style. He seldom affects the pathetic, and never succeeds in it.

Bishop Atterbury is perhaps the most elegant and classical writer among our divines. His discourses have all the flow and elegance of Cicero, with the chasteness and purity of Demosthenes. His style is animated, yet not too highly ornamented; and his allusions are original, classical, and splendid. The sermon on the character of the Scorner is as animated a philippic as any in the compass of the whole of the Roman oratory; that on Paul before Felix is admirably pathetic.

Some of Bishop Sherlock's are, in my opinion, among the very best and most interesting sermons in the English language. His knowledge of human nature is perhaps superior to that of all the preceding writers. His arrangement is correct and striking; his subjects well-chosen, his arguments forcible and ingenious. In general I think his doctrinal are inferior to his moral discourses.

Dr. Clarke's are curious and critical, and ought to be read by every divine; he is one of the best expositors of Scripture that I know. Dr. Jortin's are nearly of the same kind. They contain a fund of excellent matter, of keen remarks, and original thought. Both these writers are, however, rather curious than popular; and are rather to be considered as repositories of matter, which may be occasionally resorted to, than as affording any discourses for immediate use.

The sermons of Seed, and those of Dr. Ogden, are both highly ornamented; and yet the ornament is of a quite different kind. The style of the former is diffuse; that of the latter is the most condensed I have ever examined. With respect to the time which these sermons would require in delivering, the former ought to be abridged, and the latter perhaps dilated; but what modern architect dare lift up a trowel against the work of a Jones or a Palladio?

The present age has produced some excellent sermons. The principal are Dr. Blair's, Mr. Hewlett's, and the present Bishop of London. Some of the first are better adapted to the closet than the pulpit; but many of

them contain admirable delineations of human character. The two last authors are too well known to be affected either by my commendation or dispraise, if indeed the latter could with any propriety be applied to them. I have heard it remarked that Dr. Blair's seem calculated for any time, and for almost any religion; those of Bishop Porteus are adapted exactly to the present time, and the present state of religion.

Should you wish for more information on this subject, you will find it in an Essay on the Composition and Delivery of a sermon, prefixed to a volume of Sermons which I published some years ago; which you will conclude has furnished many of the hints for this letter; and in that you will find all the authorities for what I have advanced on the origin and progress of pulpit eloquence.

LETTER XX.

NARRATION.....DESCRIPTION.

MY DEAR JOHN,

THOUGH oratory seems to require more genius, for if the orator would touch the heart, he must call fancy to his aid, yet it is an extraordinary fact, that taking oratory in an extensive view, as including all addresses to the passions, whether in the shape of letters, pamphlets, or speeches, almost every period of literature has produced more good orators than good narrators.

The number of good historians in any language is very limited. There are but few books of travels which are so interesting that we would wish to read them a second time; and even the fictitious narratives which issue daily in swarms from the press, are seldom well written: though for reasons, which I shall afterwards assign, this is by far the easiest form of narrative composition.

Let any man of letters try to compose an argumentative, or even an oratorical discourse, and let him afterwards attempt a narrative, and he will soon find the latter by far the more difficult task. It is difficult to form and pursue a lucid order and arrangement; it is difficult, out of the number of circumstances which will crowd upon him, to select those only which are important and striking; to know where to be brief and where to be minute; to distinguish the lights and the shades; to see on what he ought to enlarge, and what he should cursorily pass over. It is exceedingly difficult to avoid a flat and monotonous tone; to give spirit, animation, and interest to a mere recital of facts; and that, when the writer com-

poses not under the influence of passion, or the ardour of controversy, which in narrative is seldom the case.

I know not whether I shall express myself clearly or not; but I feel that, in didactic or argumentative discourses, the words arrange themselves more easily in sentences, more in the manner of colloquial discussion. In narrative the writer scarcely knows where to stop, or how to round a sentence, which may perhaps be in part the reason for the long periods of Clarendon, and some other historians. It is difficult too to draw the picture; for narrative is a picture in words, so that it shall be full, clear, and impressive, and keep awake the reader's attention through the whole.

The difficulties which I have now enumerated will in some measure anticipate the rules for narrative composition; if indeed any rules can be laid down for governing the fancy, and directing the taste. Perspicuity, it will be easily seen, is the first excellence of narrative. The impression must be clear and vivid. Whether the subject will admit of ornament or not is a remote consideration compared with this indispensable quality. On this account, the writer of even an extended history should take care to have a clear and comprehensive view of the subject in his mind, at least to a given period. He should see it as a picture or a drama before his eyes, previous to his beginning to compose. If he has this view of the subject before him, he will easily, if he has judgment and taste, distinguish the parts or circumstances which should be treated in detail, from those which should be transiently glanced at, or perhaps wholly omitted.

To have a just and comprehensive view of his subject previously formed, (at least to a certain extent as to the order of time) will enable an author to write with vivacity, and to interest his readers, for he will describe within a shorter compass, and in a manner less dull and tedious than the person who transcribes every circumstance from a note book; and the fancy will have a more unbounded range, and be able to throw in more of ornament and eloquence.

As in the style of narrative perspicuity is the first object, an author should be careful that every sentence may present a distinct image, for nothing confuses more than when several circumstances are blended or complicated one with another. Yet for the sake of harmony, and to avoid a monotonous tone, which is a very common vice of narration, the sentences must not be too short. I have been told that Mr. Gibbon was in the habit of composing while he walked about his room; and that he never committed a sentence to paper till it was perfectly formed in his mind. The purest, best, and most expressive terms, should be chosen for narrative. Many of the vulgarisms which are allowed in the oratorical effusions of Mr. Burke, would not be endured in narrative, nor would he have introduced them. In the style of oratory we expect the flights and eccentricities of fancy; we can forgive something that may disgust where there is much to please; but in that of narrative we expect an even flow, not turbid or impure.

The degree of ornament or figure to be employed must depend in a great measure on the subject; but in general it is safer to attempt too little in the way of ornament than too much. Nothing tends more to confuse a narrative than a style too florid; though figurative language, sparingly, and judiciously introduced, occasionally gives animation. The comparison is a figure too flat and formal to suit with narrative, and almost the only figure which may be freely employed is the metaphor. But even metaphors, when introduced, should be easy and natural, for recondite or remote allusions perplex the mind, and withdraw the attention from the subject. They must not be common-place neither, for nothing renders a style so frigid as common-place ornaments. But after all, on this as on every practical subject of literature, I must have recourse to a maxim which I recommended very early in our correspondence. The attentive and studious perusal of the best writers in this, as well as in every other department, will effect infinitely more than any abstract rules or observations whatever. Read carefully the most approved

narrators; mark their manner of bringing events and circumstances before your view; observe their mode of connecting them; the compass and turn of their periods. You will see that there is nothing abrupt; nothing either defectively terminated, or violently or harshly introduced; or where there is a deviation from the thread or course of the story, the reader's mind is prepared by a short introduction or apology, so that the smoothness and simplicity of the narrative shall not be materially interrupted. As you will have to write in English, I would advise you to study the best models in your own language, for none has better writers of narrative. It will also be an improving exercise, if, after having read a long passage, and made yourself master of the facts, you close the book and try to narrate them yourself, when the comparison will shew you your own defects, and enable you to avoid them on a future occasion. For the grave kind of narration examine the style of Robertson, Hume, Gibbon, Goldsmith,* and Dr. Hawkesworth's Voyages; for the lighter and more familiar kinds, the short narratives in the Spectator, especially those of Mr. Addison; some of a similar nature in the Rambler of Dr. Johnson; and the Adventurer of Dr. Hawkesworth, will afford you unexceptionable specimens.

Description makes a part of every narrative, and is so nearly allied to this kind of composition, that it may be safely treated under the same head. Though I do not recommend so mechanical a practice as the use of topics, or *communes loci*, yet every person who has to describe should have always something of a general plan in his mind, to which he can recur, and which he may apply to particular cases, so that no material circumstance shall be omitted. Thus, in describing a place, the author must advert to the climate, the situa-

* The History of England, in a series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son, is an admirable specimen of historical language, sufficiently familiar, without any loss of dignity.

tion, the soil, the harbour, if a sea-port, the buildings, &c. In describing a battle, he will not forget the characters of the respective commanders, the nature of the troops, the proportions of cavalry and infantry, the characters of the soldiers as to country, discipline, valour and conduct, the position, order, and disposition of the two armies. If he does this in the way of contrast, it will add greatly to the liveliness of the description. The account of the onset, and the issue of the engagement, must depend upon the particular facts and incidents.

Again, in the delineation of any human character, an historian will give some account of the personal qualities of the individual he describes, as to stature, general appearance, and particularly as to the character of his countenance. He will notice his lineage and his education; the passions for which he has been most remarkable, the studies in which he has been most eminent, and thus proceed to the characteristic and marking features of his mind. Sallust perhaps exceeds every author, ancient or modern, in the delineation of character. His portrait of Catiline is alive in every part; we do not look upon a picture, we see, and converse with the man.

Lastly, if you have to describe any natural phenomenon, it will be right to acquaint yourself philosophically with its causes and its effects, and this will operate against your forgetting any material circumstance in the description. There is an excellent description of the presages of a thunder storm in Beccaria, which I have copied in the Economy of Nature. The moving pillars of sand in the desart, as described by Mr. Bruce, in his Travels, must interest any reader; and the following description of a phenomenon, which is unfortunately not uncommon, will serve as a fair example: it is that of an earthquake by the Abbe Raynal.

"This phenomenon, which is ever irregular in its sudden returns, is however announced by very perceptible omens. When the shock is considerable, it is preceded by a murmur in the air, the noise of which is like that of a heavy rain falling from a cloud that sud-

denly bursts and discharges its waters. This noise seems to be the effect of a vibration of the air, which is agitated in several different directions. The birds are then observed to dart in their flight; neither their tails nor their wings serve them any longer as oars and helms to swim in the fluid of the skies; they dash themselves against the walls, the trees, and the rocks, whether it be that this vertigo of nature dazzles and confuses them, or that the vapours of the earth take away their strength and power to command their movements.

"To this tumult in the air is added the rumbling of the earth, whose cavities and deep recesses re-echo to each other's noises. The dogs answer these previous tokens of a general disorder of nature, by howling in an extraordinary manner. The animals stop, and, by a natural instinct, hold out their legs that they may not fall. Upon these indications the inhabitants instantly run out of their houses, with terror impressed upon their countenances, and fly to search in the inclosures of public places, or in the fields, an asylum from the fall of the roofs. The cries of children, the lamentations of women, the sudden darkness of an unexpected night; every thing combines to aggravate the too real evils of a dire calamity, which subverts every thing by the excruciating tortures of the imagination, which is distressed and confounded, and loses, in the contemplation of this disorder, the thought and courage to remedy it."

The imagination will, however, be most powerfully assisted by the perusal of fine descriptions in the best authors, such as the return of Agrippina in Tacitus; that of the defeat of the Romans by the Samnites; and the return of the consuls, in the 9th book of Livy; that of the temple of Daphne, in the 23d chapter of Gibbon; and of the Earthquake, in the beginning of the 26th chapter of the same author, which is more ornamented, but less general, than that which I have inserted above.

History, from the importance of the subject, the rise, fate, and fall of nations, and from its utility in affording the best instruction in politics, and the most interesting views of human nature, holds the first rank among nar-

rative compositions. Voyages and travels may be considered as the next in consequence; and to those fictitious narratives, composed chiefly for entertainment, under the names of Romances and Novels, may be assigned the lowest place. It must, however, be the object of my next letters to treat of these distinctly, as I should greatly exceed my limits, or do injustice to the subject, should I endeavour to compress them into this.

LETTER XXI.

HISTORY.....ANCIENT HISTORIANS.....SCRIPTURE HISTORY....HERODOTUS.....THUCIDYDES.....XENOPHON.....POLYBIUS....SALLUST....LIVY....TACITUS.....COMNENA....DE THOU....DAVILA....MODERN HISTORY.....BUCHANAN....CLARENDON....RAPIN. ..LYTTLETON....HUME...ROBERTSON....GIBBON.

MY DEAR JOHN,

HISTORY may be classed under two general divisions, the history of nations and of individuals; the latter has been termed biography. The history of nations, or public history, will again admit of certain subdivisions, viz. history, properly so called, and chronicles, annals and memoirs.

The first histories of all nations, I have no doubt, were originally in verse; and those early histories which are now extant, even in prose, bear in some measure the characters of poetry. The scripture histories, though brief, are almost poetical. Whether they were originally composed in metre or not, our ignorance of the Hebrew measures renders us incompetent to decide. The older histories of other nations have all somewhat of a dramatic complexion, and the fictitious speeches which are ascribed to their principal character, savour more of the epic than of what I conceive should be the character of true history.

If, however, such is the origin of history, as I conceive it was, this alliance with poetry has given to it a dignity, an elevation, a life and spirit above that of a mere chronicle. Instead of a bare record of facts and dates, it is now an artificial composition; a splendid emanation of genius, when well executed, as much as an ora-

tion or an epic poem, and scarcely perhaps a less laborious effort.

You will think I shall never have done with divisions and classifications; for I must remark that public history properly so called may again be divided under two heads; 1st. Those general histories which record the transactions of a nation from its rise to its fall; and 2dly. Those histories which treat of a particular period or a particular event. Of the first class are those of Herodotus (which may indeed be regarded as a history of the world to his own time,) Livy, Justin (which is an abridgment of Trogus Pompeius, now lost) Velleius Paterculus, Eutropius, perhaps Tacitus; and in modern times, Rapin's, Hume's, and the larger histories of our own country, and that of Mr. Gibbon. In the second class we may range Thucidydes' History of the Peloponesian War, the two Histories of Sallust, Guiccardini, Davila, Clarendon's History of the Civil Wars in England, the various histories of the Reformation, Dr. Robertson's History of Charles V., and of Scotland at a particular period, Mr. Roscoe's Lorenzo de Medicis, and Leo X., and many others.

It will be obvious, and it will be confirmed by the perusal, that the writer who records a particular event or a particular period, has the easier, and the pleasanter task. He may adopt a perfect unity of design, may arrange his subject to the best advantage, may dramatize it, if I may use the expression. He will have the same set of actors and characters; and can obtain a much clearer view of his subject and all its parts and circumstances, than he who has to drudge through the records of ages, and pursue, often with a faint and glimmering light, the progress of a nation from barbarism to refinement and greatness, and afterwards through all the mazes of luxury and corruption to its enslavement or dissolution.

A French critic terms Mr. Gibbon's an "endless history." Perhaps indeed, consistently with his title, he might have stopped when the seat of empire was transferred from Rome; perhaps more properly at the divi-

sion of the empire; still more properly when it was overrun by the barbarians. But who could wish so enchanting a writer to stop at all? His history is indeed not that of a particular dynasty, scarcely that of a particular nation, but of many. But whether we regard it as one or several histories, our only regret is, that instead of having written so much he did not write more, or that he should have left a subject untouched by the magic of his pen.

In what may be termed general history, however, every writer will find it commodious to distribute it into such portions or periods as may enable him to adopt a unity of design for each portion, to exhibit every great event clear and distinct, and to finish one portion or period before he begins upon another. As the materials of history must be drawn from many sources, it must be compiled by the aid of notes or references collected with a view to the arrangement the historian means to pursue, generally I conceive in the order of time. It will however facilitate the task, if he takes one author for his basis, and makes his notes refer to others, either on the margin, or on a separate slip of paper. This I have indeed heard was the practice of Mr. Gibbon. At all events, however, the historian before he begins must have a complete view of his subject in his mind, and compose in a great measure from his preconceived ideas, if he wishes to avoid the character of a mere copyist or transcriber.

It is almost common-place to say, that the great requisites of history are truth, impartiality, and perspicuity. The style of history should be grave, dignified, temperate and sedate. Purity is more essential than ornament, for reasons which I have already assigned; yet the style should not be monotonous, but animated, whenever the occasion is of sufficient importance.

Historical writing as such, without reference to the poetical histories is very ancient, for we may regard the Pentateuch of Moses as the first history. From well authenticated tradition, and from the best of evidence, we are fully authorised to ascribe it to the venerable

personage whose name it bears; but the latter parts were undoubtedly added by Joshua, or some person under his direction. It includes in a small compass a vast scope and a long period, being a history of man from the creation to the death of the author, and including the whole code of laws, civil and religious, which was given to the people of Israel. If no religious character was attached to it; if we ceased to venerate it as the origin and source of that faith which we profess, it would be a most curious relic of antiquity, and must be allowed to contain a record of the first ages, bearing more internal marks of authenticity than any ancient history extant. The style is simple and sententious. It is often interspersed with fragments of poetry, perhaps parts of the original memorial lines from which the narrative was in part at least compiled. Yet it cannot class under the character of a chronicle or annals, but is a regular, though brief, history of many ages and many important transactions. Some parts, and particularly the history of Joseph, are incomparably beautiful, and there is no part deficient in spirit. Yet from the singular, and almost metrical style in which it is composed, it cannot be a model for imitation, and is scarcely an object of criticism in this age of literature.

The other parts of sacred history, particularly the Books of Samuel, of Kings, and Chronicles, belong rather to the class of annals, than of general history. One circumstance I must remark of them all, that brief as they are, they are remarkable for exhibiting always a striking picture to the mind of the reader. They lose not the matter in general, but the principal actors and characters are before our eyes. This is strongly exemplified in the transactions of Samuel with Eli, and afterwards with Saul. In the life of David, and particularly in the affecting interview with Nathan the prophet; in the history of Jeroboam, and of the prophet who declaims against the altars; the seizure of the vineyard of Naboth, and the death of Jezebel. Who can now write history that makes so forcible an impression, or that is so easily and perfectly remembered?

The Greeks and Romans excelled in historical writing as much as in any department of literature. The reason is obvious....Oratory is nearly allied to history, and no people ever cultivated oratory with more indefatigable attention. The democratical governments of these nations afforded such a scope for the display of eloquence, that it was almost the only road to celebrity and promotion. The general was obliged to study this fascinating art both to obtain advancement and to defend himself if assailed by faction. The statesman had no other means of rising in the estimation of his countrymen. History, therefore, when committed to writing by generals and statesmen thus accomplished, must necessarily be elegant and rhetorical. Such were the works of Thucidydes, Xenophon, Polybius, Sallust, and perhaps Herodotus and Livy. With respect to the attaining of information also, as they had not the advantages of modern writers, where every public transaction is committed to the press, their labour and exertions are almost incredible. Independant of his own observation, Thucidydes, we are assured, expended large sums of money to obtain correct information. Polybius travelled over most of the countries which were the scenes of the transactions he records, and particularly visited the Alps, that he might form a correct opinion of the celebrated march of Hannibal. Indeed we have the authority of Plautus to satisfy us that in the opinion of the ancients no man was capable of writing history who had not travelled. I allude to a speech of Messenio to Menechmus, advising him to return home....

"Quin nos hinc domum redimus, nisi historiam scripturi sumus."

Of the ancient Greek historians I need scarcely tell you that the most celebrated are Herodotus, Thucidydes, and Xenophon. I cannot better introduce the first of these to your notice than in the beautiful language of Mr. Hayley, whose Essay on History deserves to be read by every person of taste, not only for some excel-

lent poetry which it contains, though it is rather unequal, but for sound criticism, and much well-directed reading, particularly in the notes.

> "The dome expands! Behold th' historic sire!
> "Ionic roses mark his soft attire;
> "Bold in his air, but graceful in his mien
> "As the fair figure of his favour'd queen,*
> "When her proud galley sham'd the Persian van,
> "And grateful Xerxes own'd her more than man.
> "Soft as the stream, whose dimpling waters play,
> "And wind in lucid lapse their pleasing way,
> "His rich Homeric elocution flows,
> "For all the muses modulate his prose."

The title of "father of history" was assigned him by no less an authority than Cicero, not, we may reasonably suppose, as the first person who ever engaged in that line of writing, for several had preceded him; but as an expression of excellence, such as he assumed himself in the title of "Pater Patriæ," for having extinguished the conspiracy of Catiline.

The history of Herodotus is in truth a wonderful production. It may properly be classed among general histories, for it comprehends a vast extent of time, and includes the history of all the nations of the civilized world at that period. He was evidently a great traveller, and had visited most of the countries whose history he details. He was not less a geographer than an historian; but his great excellence lies in detailing the manners and customs of the different nations. As to the nonsense which has been written by those who have followed contemporary authors who were envious of his fame, respecting his credulity, I pay but little attention to it. It was necessary that a history such as that of Herodotus, should include some fables, but no writer can be more guarded than he is. To give an idea of the genius and character of the particular people whom

* Artemisia of Halicarnassus. See Herod. lib. viii.

he delineates, it was necessary to mention many facts which he suspected, and some that he knew to be false. He declares, that "though he considers it as his duty to deliver what he has heard as to any point treated of in his history, yet he is far from giving as true and accurate all that he relates." In most cases, where any thing of a doubtful nature occurs, he generally adds, "this is as I have heard the fact related," or he produces his authority. Mr. Hume, whose classical erudition I have on a former occasion presumed to question, asserts that the "first page of Thucidydes is the commencement of real history;" but if we were without the nine books of Herodotus, we should find ourselves much at a loss respecting the events of the Persian war, and many of the early transactions of the Greeks; and I cannot persuade myself to believe that he would have acquired the vast reputation he obtained among his contemporaries, many of whom must have been witnesses of all the later facts which he details, had he not deserved the character of a faithful and correct historian. All agree that he is a most entertaining and interesting writer; and I think his style a model of sweetness and simplicity. There is a translation in our language by Mr. Beloe, which possesses all the simplicity of the original.

Thucydides is among those who have confined their history to a particular period and event. It comprehends the space, as I remember of about twenty-seven years, and treats of the Peloponesian war, which happened in his own time, and of many of the facts he was a spectator. His task was of course much easier than that of Herodotus, and he has executed it in a masterly manner. He traces facts and their causes with the keen eye of a consummate politician, and embellishes them with the pen of an expert rhetorician. There are many masterly touches of oratory in the fictitious speeches which he puts in the mouths of his principal characters; the funeral oration of Pericles in the second book I have always particularly admired: perhaps Thucidydes is not unfairly characterized by Mr. Hayley....

" His the rich prize that caught his early gaze,*
" Th' eternal pleasure of increasing praise,
" Pure from the stain of favour or of hate,
" His nervous line unfolds the deep debate,
" Explores the seeds of war; with matchless force
" Draws discord springing from ambition's source,
" With all her demagogues who murder peace,
" In the fierce struggles of contentious Greece."

General Andreossi, in a memoir lately published containing observations on the principal historians, chiefly with a view to the accuracy of their military descriptions, says of Thucidydes, that " his work is a masterpiece of military talent, unfolding the internal policy of the Greeks, and the operations of a long and stubborn contest."

It is not easy to determine in which class to place the elegant and accomplished Xenophon. If we regard his continuation of Thucidydes, he will class with general historians; since his object was evidently to make it a general history, of Greece at least, for a considerable period. " The Anabasis, or retreat of the ten thousand," would by many be placed among the commentaries, memoirs, chronicles and annals; and his Cyropædia must, I think, be regarded as a fictitious narrative. The Anabasis is confessedly his most finished work. It may be considered as a history limited to a short period; but in whatever light it is regarded, nothing can be more interesting, pleasant, and entertaining. It afforded, undoubtedly, the model for Cæsar's Commentaries, but is a more interesting and finer composition. Xenophon never rises to the sublime, but is always chaste, correct, elegant, and engaging. He enchains the mind of his reader, and renders him impatient to hear what event is next to occur. Simplicity is a remarkable characteristic of this work; even the order of the words is little inverted, and this, with the pure At-

* When a boy he wept for emulation at hearing one of the books of Herodotus recited with applause at the Olympic games.

tic dictions, renders it an easy book for those who have made little progress in the Greek language. On looking into Mr. Hayley I am surprised to find how much my opinion has been anticipated by this judicious writer....

" O rich in all the blended gifts that grace
" Minerva's darling sons of Attic race!
" Thy simple diction, free from glaring art,
" With sweet allurement steals upon the heart;
" Pure as the rill that nature's hand refines,
" A cloudless mirror of thy soul it shines.
" Two passions there by soft contention please,
" The love of martial fame, and learned ease,
" Those friendly colours exquisitely join'd
" To form th' enchanting picture of thy mind;
" Thine was the praise bright models to afford
" To Cæsar's rival pen and rival sword," &c.

Xenophon was much studied by the Roman warriors, as affording the best instructions in the military art, and particularly by Lucullus. General Andreossi says, " Every military man should study Xenophon, particularly in his famous retreat of the ten thousand, when he will find it difficult to decide whether the glory of the retreat, or the merit of the narrator are most deserving of unqualified admiration."

I am uncertain whether Polybius ought to be accounted a Greek or a Roman historian. His language is the former, but his subject is Roman; and his long residence at Rome, and his intimacy with Scipio and Lælius, almost naturalized him to that part of the world. Had his intention been completed, he would have ranked among general historians, for he styles his history " Catholic, or Universal." Of forty books which he wrote, however, only the first five have been transmitted to posterity, with an abridgement of the twelve following, said to have been made by the younger Brutus. General Andreossi appears more partial to this writer than to any of the other ancient historians; he regards him as master of all the tactics of his time, and gives him not less credit for his correct description of all mi-

litary operations. His style is, however, allowed by all to be harsh and unpolished, and is thus characterized by Mr. Hayley....

" O highly perfect in each nobler part,
" The sage's wisdom and the soldier's art,
" This richer half of Grecian praise is thine:
" But o'er thy style the slightest graces pine,
" And tir'd attention toils thro' many a maze,
" To reach the purport of thy doubtful phrase."

We cannot sufficiently deplore the loss of Sallust's Roman History from the death of Sylla to the conspiracy of Catiline, for we should doubtless have found in it the same depth of judgment, the same penetrating sagacity, keenness of remark, and profound knowledge of the human heart, that are conspicuous in his other works; and altogether they would have formed a fine code of Roman history during one of the most interesting periods of the Republic, which indeed it is probable the author intended. The style of Sallust is concise, nervous, and sententious. He was accused by his contemporaries of the affectation of using obsolete words and phrases, but I confess I am not critic enough to be a judge of this circumstance, and I find in him nothing but matter for admiration. He particularly excelled in the delineation of character, and in this at least affords a model for all future historians. General Andreossi seems to approve much of his military descriptions, particularly in his history of the Jugurthine war; but the General makes an observation, which, if I understand it properly, surprises me...." The consummate ability with which Metellus extricates his army and pursues his march, when surrounded by Jugurtha, is the *last* proof left us of Roman skill and ingenuity in the field of action." What does the General make of the campaigns of Cæsar, and even of inferior generals who succeeded him? Mr. Haley's short character of Sallust contains sound criticism.....

" Sententious Sallust leads the lofty train,
" Clear, though concise, elaborately plain,
" Poising his scale of words with frugal care,
" Nor leaving one superfluous atom there!
" Yet well displaying, in a narrow space,
" Truth's native strength, and nature's easy grace;
" Skill'd to detect, in tracing action's course,
" The hidden motive, and the human source."

The history of Livy is certainly a most magnificent work. It is written in a style of grand and flowing, perhaps unequal eloquence. His descriptions, that of the battle of Cannæ for instance, are bold and striking. Yet I confess Livy, with all these excellencies, is no favourite of mine. His gross and glaring partiality disgusts; and his long and complex periods, and his tedious and declamatory orations tire. General Andreossi holds in little estimation his military knowledge; indeed accuses him of such gross ignorance, that he says, " He even forgets that military tactics had undergone a revolution, and most awkwardly confounds the practice of his own time with that of the Scipio's."

As you have seen the dark side of the question, however, it is but just to lay before you the opinion of a critic more favourable to Livy.....

" In bright pre-eminence that Greece might own,
" Sublimer Livy claims th' historic throne;
" With that rich eloquence, whose golden light
" Brings the full scene directly to the sight;
" That zeal for truth which interest cannot lend,
" That fire which freedom ever gives her friend.
" Immortal artist of a work supreme!
" Delighted Rome beheld, with proud esteem,
" Her own bright image of Colossal size,
" From thy long toils in purest marble rise." *Hayley.*

From what I have said, you will perceive that the Roman historians have furnished us with examples of two very different forms of style in narrative composition; of the concise, compressed and sententious in Sallust; and afterwards in a still superior writer, Tacitus;

and of the flowing and rhetorical in Livy. Which of these ought to be pursued must depend on the genius and disposition of the writer, and in part on the nature of the subject. Every writer ought however to adopt a uniform style, which, after some practice, will almost come of course, if he writes from himself, and is not content to be a servile imitator of others. I once knew a person who, from habits of imitation, could not avoid at length writing, in some degree, in the style of the author he read last. One ill effect, however, attends the tribe of imitators, that they generally copy the faults, and not the excellencies of their models.

Though a part of the great work of Tacitus bears the modest name of annals, yet it is properly history; for it has not the character of annals. That part which he calls his history was written first, though there is every reason to believe that he meant the whole to form a connected chain, comprehending the history of the Roman empire from the age of Augustus to his own time. There never was a genius more happily adapted to the writing of history than that of Tacitus. He was a statesman and an orator, and master of all the learning of his age. His discernment and knowledge of human nature are unrivalled. He draws a picture with more animation than, I think, any other writer; of this a fine instance will be found in the latter part of the second, and beginning of the third book, which describes the latter moments of Germanicus, and the events which immediately succeeded his death. His remarks are keen and profound. General Andreossi says of him...." The man who is called upon to defend his fellow soldiers, whose conduct is to influence the fate of his country, will acquire every information by studying Tacitus." Like his master Sallust, who is evidently in a great degree his model, Tacitus is eminent for his skill in drawing characters.

With Tacitus I may safely close my view of the eminent historians of antiquity, for it is only necessary in such a sketch to notice those who particularly excelled. With the writers of the middle ages I am little ac-

quainted. You will find in Mr. Hayley some very pretty lines on the Princess Anna Comnena, and on De Thou, as well as on Guicciardini and Davila. De Thou I have read in part, but found him dry and tedious, though he occasionally draws a character in a striking manner. It was however not my intention in this letter to run through the whole catalogue of historical writers, but to point your attention to a few who ought to be studied as models; to give a sort of history of history. I shall therefore pass to those of our own country, for I cannot help subscribing to the honest and impartial testimony of General Andreossi....That "the best historians, at least for the last century, have been English."

In the rapid survey which I am compelled to make of British historians, I shall pass over such works as Raleigh's History of the World, and Knolles's History of the Turks, as productions long since consigned to the libraries of the curious, and little attractive to the eye of taste, though neither of those which I have mentioned are destitute of merit. Burnet, Ludlow, &c. will be noticed under another head. But I cannot overlook the excellence of one of our early writers, I mean the learned, the manly, the much injured Buchanan. Whether we regard his clearness, his spirit, his love of freedom, or his pure latinity, his history will deserve to rank with some of the best that issued from the ancient schools. There is much good painting in Buchanan; and I particularly recommend to your perusal the interesting scene between Malcolm and Macduff, previous to the fall of the usurper. In the latter periods of his history he has been charged with partiality, but that charge has never been proved. He lived in times when party regarded calumny as a duty, and he embraced the thankless side, the side of liberty.

Clarendon is not to be considered as a general historian, since his subject is confined to the civil wars in the reign of Charles I. and II. Clarendon's history is, however, in all senses of the word, a great work. In style and conduct it comes nearer Livy than any modern performance. He excels in drawing characters,

though his portraits are occasionally darkened by the black tinge of party spirit. The style of English composition had not arrived at perfection in his time; and his periods are justly censured as long, embarrassed, and sometimes ambiguous. Yet he was perhaps the first writer in prose who shewed the powers of the English language, and laid the foundation of those beauties which the succeeding age displayed.

It is somewhat singular that the first who composed a good general history of our country should be a Frenchman. To Rapin every successive generation has assigned the praise of industry, accuracy, and impartiality....no slight commendation of an historian. I never read his history in the original, it being superseded in this country by the very slovenly translation of Tindal. General Andreossi, however, who ought to be a judge of the language, denies that he possesses any taste. He is too fond of inserting the whole of documents, of which he should only have given abstracts. Yet whoever would look for truth, the great object in reading history, must still, I fear, have recourse to the ponderous volumes of Rapin. He was greatly assisted by that invaluable collection of records, Rymer's Fædera, which continued to be published while he was writing his history. Mr. Hayley denominates him the British Polibius, and adds....

> "Thy sword, thy pen, have both thy name endear'd;
> "This join'd our arms, and that our story clear'd;
> "Thy Foreign hand discharg'd the historian's trust,
> "Unsway'd by party, and to freedom just."

We had, however, scarcely any work of the historical kind in our language, which deserves the name of elegant, till the present times. Lord Littleton's Henry is a fine and chaste composition, but is rather prolix. It would be unfair, though I dislike his principles both political and religious, to deny Mr. Hume the praise of a chaste, correct, and pleasing writer. I have been told by some who knew him, that he composed with great

difficulty, and even with painful feelings; yet his genius seems to me happily calculated for narration. He is clear and spirited; and though he can rarely reach either the sublime or the pathetic, he always interests. Some of his dissertations, as that on the consequences of the invention of gunpowder, &c. might have been omitted; they remind us of scholastic disputations, and have no connection with a recital of facts. He is not copious; his vocabulary is remarkably limited, but it is well chosen. I wish, however, he possessed more honesty, more industry, and less of that rancorous spirit so peculiarly characteristic of infidels, that even Mr. Gibbon terms Voltaire "a bigot, an intolerant bigot." He frequently misrepresents when party or prejudice offers a temptation; as is particularly evinced in his account of Barebone's parliament, and the character of Milton,* and his negligence is very reprehensible. I have been told that he has copied pages, I might almost say volumes, from Carte, with only slight alterations in language. All these circumstances render his history of little value as an authentic record.

If I stand in fear of offending our northern countrymen by this qualified censure on Mr. Hume, I hope I shall amply compensate by declaring my unbiassed opinion, that the most accomplished historian of ancient or modern times, is Dr. Robertson. His style is rich and copious, and he may be said to wield with ease all the powers and the treasures of the English language. Few provincial or idiomatic phrases appear in his classical pages. He is sufficiently florid and fanciful to interest continually, and yet not so much as to tire or disgust. His arrangement is always luminous, his incidents well selected, and his story well told. The History of Scotland is extremely engaging, and not the least interesting is the detail of domestic and private transactions, which display the respective characters in

* "When giddy and fantastic dreams abuse
"A Hampden's virtue and a Shakspeare's muse."

the happiest lights. But his great work is the Charles V., a performance which will never be superseded, and which will be read while the English language endures. The preliminary dissertation is the best view which is any where to be found of the feudal institutions, though it might have been spared from the history; for they were almost at an end when the history commenced, and perhaps something still more important might have been substituted in a concise view of the Jus publicum Imperii. But how great and how interesting is his account of that amazing event the Reformation! He writes with all his heart; he rises with his subject; he is sublime, pathetic, yet every where rational. He is the only writer who has done justice, or who perhaps could do justice, to the exalted character of Luther. He has drawn him, and indeed all his other characters, with the pencil of a Vandyke, as striking as elegant. His America is the least valuable of his histories; but the subject was better known, and had been treated by other modern historians.

With an imagination more vigorous, and a style more highly ornamented than Dr. Robertson's; with equal industry, and more learning, Mr. Gibbon has cultivated a long, and as it was thought, a barren tract of history, connecting the ancient with the modern. I have no doubt but Montesquieu's tract, "Sur la grandeur and decadence des Romains," suggested to Mr. Gibbon this grand and arduous undertaking. Having already spoken of Mr. Gibbon, it is not necessary at present to extend very far the criticism. In this great work whatever is profound in research, brilliant in display, picturesque in description, and enchanting in diction, will be found. Yet I think in luminous arrangement he is inferior to Dr. Robertson. He frequently breaks in upon his main subject by a long dissertation or episode. The 15th and 16th chapters, independant of their pernicious tendency, are too long, and perhaps the whole of his ecclesiastical details might have been curtailed. If in his style there is any fault, it is perhaps an excess of ornament, and this occasionally produces a degree of ambi-

guity. But his style was characteristically his own; and we may apply to him with propriety Mr. Addison's lines on Cowley, taking *wit*, as it was then generally used, for genius or fancy....

> "Pardon, great writer, that I dare to name
> "Th' unnumber'd beauties of thy page with blame;
> "Thy only fault was wit in its excess;
> "But wit like thine in any shape will please."

In my next letter I shall treat of that class of narratives which comes under the description of annals, chronicles, memoirs, biography, &c.

LETTER XXII.

ANNALS...CHRONICLES....MEMOIRS....BIOGRAPHY, &c.... FROISSART....HOLINGSHEAD....STOW....CÆSAR...PRINCESS ANNA COMNENA..ALBERQUERQUE...LUDLOW.. WHITLOCK....BURNET.....DALRYMPLE....NEPOS....PLUTARCH..DIOGENES LAERTIUS...SUETONIUS...BAYLE.. DR. JOHNSON....BIOGRAPHICA BRITTANICA.

MY DEAR JOHN,

ANNALS and chronicles with us have nearly the same meaning, and denote a series of facts detailed in the order of time. The one of these words is derived from the Latin *annus* (a year), and the other from the Greek χρονος (time). The former, however, was the more ancient appellation, for Tacitus entitles the earlier portion of his incomparable history *annales*, and the word *chronicle*, I do not find to have come into use till the middle ages, or rather later; for though our translators have, with some propriety, given that appellation to two of the books of the Scripture history, the title they bear in the original hardly warrants the translation. A journal or diary is a narrative divided into still smaller portions, and which marks the occurrences of every day.

This species of narrative demands a minute attention to the order of time, and that no event shall be either omitted or introduced out of its regular course. This is a form of composition calculated to cramp the genius. It is too formal to admit of eloquence, and its best commendation is fidelity. This quality indeed we must necessarily require in the annalist; but the graces of style are less confidently expected from him than from the professed historian. In annals and chronicles there is also a more minute and copious detail than in

a history, which is a more concentrated view of the subject. Both seem better adapted to the recording of recent events than to the relation of facts long past, and therefore less immediately interesting.

After the revival of letters, the Germans seem to have more particularly applied to the writing of annals than any other of the European nations, and many valuable, though not polished works are extant among them under this title. Our learned countryman, Strype, also published annals of the Reformation, which is a work of high authority, but deficient in elegance.

If we except Froissart, whom yet we may almost account an Englishman, the title of chronicles has been, I believe, almost exclusively used by the English writers. Froissart's is a correct example of what a chronicle should be. We there find all the minuteness of description and detail, even to the delineation of the arms of the knights, who make the most conspicuous figure in his narrative. But though this style of composition may seem dry and tedious, he has contrived to make it interesting. All the heroes of the time, the King, the Black Prince, Sir Walter Manny, Sir Bertrand de Gueschlin, &c. &c. become our intimate acquaintances; we see all their domestic habits, we listen to their familiar conversation. In a studied history we see a picture; in this particular detail we see the men: all is dramatic, and the vivacity of the scene takes off from the prolixity of the detail. Mr. Hayley's character of the writer is tolerably correct....

" Yet courtesy with generous valour join'd,
" Fair twins of chivalry rejoic'd to find
" A faithful chronicler in plain Froissart;
" More rich in honesty than void of art.
" As the young peasant, led by spirits keen,
" To some great city's gay and gorgeous scene,
" Returning, with increase of proud delight,
" Dwells on the various splendour of the sight;
" And gives his tale, though told in terms uncouth;
" The charm of nature, and the force of truth,
" Though rude engaging," &c.

But you will know it better from the excellent translation by Thomas Johnnes, Esq., a gentleman who stands distinguished among his contemporaries, as the possessor of a large fortune, while he applies to literature with the industry of an author by profession. The destruction of his invaluable library by fire must be regretted by every friend to historical research, and to elegant literature.

Holinshead and Stow I have not read. They are accused by Cowley of prolixity....

> " I more voluminous should grow,
> " Chiefly if I, like them should tell,
> " All change of weathers that befel,
> " Than Holinshead or Stow."

It is however no small commendation that our incomparable Shakspeare is said to have extracted whole speeches, in his historical plays, from these authors, with very little alteration in the diction. Speed is also a chronicler of some notoriety, and it is a little remarkable, that at a period when learning was not so generally diffused as at present, both he and his predecessor Stow, should have been originally taylors.

Memoirs as the name imports, are memorandums or notes upon history, chiefly relative to facts which have fallen under the writer's own observation. They are commonly made in the order of time, and often in the form of a journal. They admit of a variety of style. They may rise to an height of elegance, or they may be loose and unstudied minutes. The former will class with laboured and artificial compositions, and will admit of any degree of polish; but in general the style should be easy and familiar. The Ancients called these compositions by the name of commentaries, and the most famous extant are those of Cæsar, containing the particulars of his wars in Gaul and Britain. A more perfect model of this kind of writing cannot be mentioned. The style is clear and simple, yet sweet and interesting. The arrangement is also luminous, the

descriptions chaste and correct, and this work should be by every narrator of battles or of travels.

The form of commentaries was adopted by several of the historians of the Greek empire, and even the Alexiad of the accomplished Princess Anna Comnena may be ranged in the same class. I cannot resist the pleasure of transcribing Mr. Hayley's lines on this elegant female....

" For in the lovely charms of female youth,
" A second Pallas guards the throne of truth!
" And with Comnena's royal name imprest,
" The zone of beauty binds her Attic vest.
" Fair star of wisdom, whose unrivalled light
" Breaks through the stormy cloud of thickest night;
" Though in the purple of proud misery nurst,
" From those oppressive bands thy spirit burst;
" Pleas'd, in thy public labours, to forget
" The keen domestic pangs of fond regret;
" Pleas'd to preserve from time's destructive rage,
" A father's virtues in thy faithful page!
" Too pure of soul to violate, or hide
" Th' historian's duty in the daughter's pride."

The son of the great Alberquerque adopted also the same title for the historical detail of his father's exploits and conquests in India. It is the best written prose composition in the Portuguese language.

The Latin title commentaries was succeeded by the French word memoirs; and more works of this kind have been published in France than in any other country, many of them under the title "Memoirs pour servir a l'Histoire," &c. Among a vast class of publications of this description, the Memoirs of de Retz, and of the Duc de Sully, stand pre-eminent. The latter is one of the most interesting books I ever read.

In our language we have some excellent historical records under this title, among which I particularly recommend "Ludlow's Memoirs" of the civil war, and Cromwell's usurpation. He is a most honest, clear, and interesting writer. It is astonishing that the failure of that great and unfortunate experiment should not

have convinced him of the total impracticability of a form of government truly republic. Like all other speculatists, he dreams upon the subject, and retains his prejudices to the last: but we must take the man as he is, and upon other subjects he is on the whole liberal and candid. Whitlock, who records the same transactions, has entitled his work "Memorials," but this is only to be regarded as a different orthography.

Bishop Burnet's "history of his own times" would have been properly termed memoirs. The composition is so loose, and occasionally so unconnected, and so many private transactions and conversations are recorded, that the work does not properly fall under the denomination of history. I do not mean by this to detract from its merit. As an original and authentic record, it is more valuable than if it had been studied. Whatever he gives upon his own knowledge bears the stamp of truth; but it is not surprising that a writer who narrates all he hears should be sometimes deceived. Mr. Hayley's character of him seems very just.....

"Yet Burnet's page may lasting glory hope,
"Howe'er insulted by the spleen of Pope.
"Though his rough language haste and warmth denote,
"With ardent honesty of soul he wrote;
"Though critic censures on his work may shower,
"Like faith his freedom has a saving power."

It is a proof indeed of merit, when even Pope could not write him down, though he has classed the good bishop with some very inferior writers in one invidious couplet.....

"From these the world will judge of men and books,
"Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons and Cooks."

It is impossible however to read Burnet's history, and not to be involuntarily reminded of the arch ridicule upon it conveyed in the "Memoirs of P. P., clerk of this parish."

If Burnet with some arrogance entitled his memoirs a history, Sir John Dalrymple has, with a modesty

scarcely less culpable, entitled his history "Memoirs." This is an excellent, and on the whole a well written work. It contains some of the best and most judicious political observations that are any where to be found. Though I am an infidel with respect to the charges against those distinguished patriots Russel, Sydney, the Duke of Shrewsbury, &c. yet I believe that Sir John's authorities are fairly quoted; but let us remember on what evidence the charges ultimately rest, on that of a depraved and intriguing Frenchman.

Biography is a species of narrative nearly connected with history, and is of ancient date, though evidently not so old as history; for we have nothing that can properly be termed biography in the writing of the Hebrews. The book of Joshua is obviously a continuation of the history from the Pentateuch; and the book of Job is evidently a poem.* The same may be said of the books of Samuel as of Joshua. The Cyropædia of Xenophon is evidently a work of imagination.

For a specimen of regular biography we can therefore extend our views no further back than the work of Cornelius Nepos, who was contemporary with Cicero and Cæsar. Yet from the style in which these lives are composed, and the author omitting to mention them as a new undertaking, we are authorized in supposing that he was not the first in that line of composition. The lives of Cornelius Nepos are dry and methodical, and the style not elegant. Plutarch is a far better writer, though we cannot even compliment him much upon his style. For his labour and research, however, we cannot be too liberal in our commendations. If we consider that he flourished in the time of Trajan, it is impossible not to wonder where he could find his materials for so many ages back. His first remark, in which he draws the line between the age of fable and that of history, made an impression on me when a boy, and has been useful to me ever since. In one opinion respect-

* See Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry.

ing Plutarch I suppose I stand alone. I shall have, I dare say, your dissent to encounter, as well as that of all young people, who are generally charmed with them; and perhaps may incur the censure even of the learned. I do not relish his parallels. The lives of no two people can be so much alike as to admit of a close comparison, and Plutarch's are often fanciful and vague; besides that, I cannot see the utility of them. When I first read them they appeared tedious and without an end; and I have not since learned to like them better. The following lines of Mr. Hayley are not uncharacteristic....

"Enchanting sage! whose living lessons teach,
"What heights of virtue human efforts reach.
"Though oft thy pen, eccentrically wild,
"Rambles, in learning's various maze beguil'd;
"Though in thy style no brilliant graces shine,
"Nor the clear conduct of correct design,
"Thy every page is uniformly bright
"With mild philanthropy's diviner light," &c.

It is no small praise to say that no author, not even of the higher classics, has been so generally read as Plutarch, or has retained his popularity so long.

Though I cannot recommend it as a model of fine writing, I know few books from which, in the early part of my life, I received more solid and useful information than from Diogenes Laertius. Had it not been for his Lives of the Sages of ancient Greece, we could have known very little about them, except Solon and Socrates. His account of their doctrines is impartial, for he seems to have been strictly.....

"Nullius addictus in verba jurare magistri."

"Sworn to no master, of no sect am I."

His record of their sayings is lively and pleasant, and may be considered as a repository of the serious wit of Greece. How he was able to collect those aphorisms is matter of wonder; and I can only suppose that he

extracted them from some older collection of lives and chronicles, now probably lost. He is rather defective in method; and, as far as we are judges of a dead language, very deficient in style.

Suetonius, in his lives of the first twelve emperors of Rome, may be considered either as an historian or biographer. Properly I think the latter, for he relates much of their private lives and transactions. His work is a most valuable collection of facts, and bears the evidence of truth and honesty; but whoever reads it can scarcely suspect the author to have been a professed rhetorician. The style is homely and abrupt, almost destitute of harmony, and deformed by Greek quotations. For his facts he should be read by all; for his manner of relating them he will be admired by no person of true taste. Tacitus's Life of Agricola cannot be raised by any commendation.

The moderns have excelled the ancients in biography. There are many excellent pieces of biography in French: among these I do not class the Dictionary of Bayle; for though it is a vast treasure of ancient and modern learning, I think there never was a work composed with so little either of judgment or of taste. The text is a mere Old Bailey record; indeed it is scarcely "the life, character, and behaviour." All that is valuable is contained in the notes, and these are often ill selected, and not less frequently tedious and trifling. Moreri's, in point of utility, is far superior to Bayle; it is indeed a most useful, and on the whole a judicious work.

Our language abounds with excellent biography. The best I ever read is Johnson's Life of Savage. He wrote it *con amore*, if you can excuse this vulgar barbarism. The following sentence I might have cited as a very fine example of climax. After relating that Savage in his distress "walked about the streets till he was weary, and lay down in summer upon a bulk, or in the winter with his associates in poverty, among the ashes of a glass-house," he resumes....

"On a bulk, in a cellar, or in a glass-house, was to be found the author of the Wanderer, the man of exalted sentiment, extensive views, and curious observation; the man whose remarks on life might have assisted the statesman, whose ideas of virtue might have enlightened the moralist; whose eloquence might have influenced senates, and whose delicacy might have polished courts."

From a deficiency of materials I conclude it happened that some of Dr. Johnson's lives of the poets are little more than mere critical sketches; yet in this point of view they are excellent, and even where the deficiency of materials is most apparent, he contrives to introduce some moral observation, or some short dissertation as valuable as interesting. As I wish rather to make you acquainted with the beauties of authors, than to exhibit a display of my own critical skill, I cannot help transcribing a charming passage from the life of Smith.

"Of Gilbert Walmsley, thus presented to my mind, let me indulge myself in the remembrance. I knew him very early; he was one of the first friends that literature procured me, and I hope that at least my gratitude made me worthy of his notice.

"He was of an advanced age, and I was only yet a boy; yet he never received my notions with contempt. He was a whig, with all the virulence and malevolence of his party; yet difference of opinion did not keep us apart. I honoured him, and he endured me.

"He had mingled with the gay world without exemption from its vices or its follies, but had never neglected the cultivation of his mind; his belief of revelation was unshaken; his learning preserved his principles; he grew first regular, then pious.

"His studies had been so various, that I am not able to name a man of equal knowledge. His acquaintance with books was great; and what he did not immediately know he would at least tell where to find. Such was his amplitude of learning, and such his copiousness of communication, that it may be doubted whether a day

now passes in which I have not some advantage from his friendship.

" At this man's table I enjoyed many cheerful and instructive hours, with companions such as are not often to be found; with one who has lengthened, and one who has gladdened life; with Dr. James whose skill in physic will be long remembered; and with David Garrick, whom I hoped to have gratified with this character of our common friend: but what are the hopes of man? I am disappointed by that stroke of death, which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure."

While I am treating of biography, I cannot pass over that noble monument to national fame, the Biographia Britannicæ; a work which I at one time flattered myself with the hope of bringing to perfection; before old age had unstrung my faculties, and palsed my hand. I am disappointed....

" Optima quique dies miseris mortalibus ævi
" Prima fugit, subeunt morbi, tristisque senectus."

Though debased by a low, and sometimes even vulgar style; though the error of Bayle has been imitated in throwing too much of the matter into notes, yet the Biographia is an invaluable work. It is a Thesaurus of English literature and science; and is incomparable for one excellence, that of presenting an abstract of almost every valuable work that had ever appeared in this country previous to its publication. The labour of Dr. Campbell, and the original compilers, in making these abstracts, astonishes me, and they will be the means of rescuing many valuable publications from oblivion.

We have long wanted a good general Biographical Dictionary; that deficiency is however now in a great measure supplied by the new edition of that which was originally published in 1761; and the public will soon be accommodated with an unexceptionable work of this nature, under the superintendance of our amiable and learned friend Dr. Aikin.

LETTER XXIII.

VOYAGES AND TRAVELS....ANSON...HAWKESWORTH... ADDISON...BURNET...LADY M. W. MONTAGUE...JOHNSON....FICTITIOUS NARRATIVE...THE XENOPHONS.... CERVANTES.....LE SAGE.....FIELDING.....SMOLLETT.... STERNE...D'ARBLOIS...RADCLIFFE...SWIFT...DE FOE.. MRS. HAMILTON...EPISTOLARY WRITINGS..CICERO... PLINY.....SENECA.....BALZAC....VOITURE.....POPE, &c..... DIALOGUE.....PLATO.....CICERO.....LUCIAN.....HORNE TOOKE.

MY DEAR JOHN,

VOYAGES and travels are another species of narrative which I must not pass over, since it differs in one essential from those which have been already mentioned. It requires considerable powers of description to render it pleasing, and great accuracy of observation to make it useful. The style of these works should be suited to the subject, but in general care should be taken to avoid too much ornament, and especially the affectation of it. Description is the rock on which most narrators of travels suffer shipwreck, especially when they attempt to be picturesque. They should remember that no language can convey a correct idea of a landscape; and the most laboured effort of this kind will be so different from the reality, that no spectator could possibly recognize it by what he had read. Descriptions of this kind ought therefore to be short and striking; the writer selecting only a few of the prominent features belonging to a place or situation, which will at once be less tiresome, and less likely to mislead than a long detail. In the delineation of manners and customs, language is most powerful; for there

are certain well defined, and well known phrases, which can express any thing of this nature, but words cannot describe mere objects of sight; even a portrait can scarcely be drawn in words, so as to express a real likeness. A traveller will be tedious if he describes every thing he sees; selection is as much his duty as that of the historian. All the errors to which I have alluded will be found in most of those ephemeral productions which almost daily choke the press, and annoy the public, under the title of "Tours to the lakes," "Rambles to watering places," "Scenery in Wales," &c. &c. What can be more uninteresting than travels in this country, along turnpike roads, between quickset hedges, among square or triangular paddocks or fields, and where there can be nothing new or extraordinary in natural produce, architecture, or manners and customs, to awaken curiosity, or to increase our stock of knowledge? Such trash is only calculated to sail silently down the stream of oblivion, with their fit companions, the usual furniture of our circulating libraries.

A traveller, who means to interest or instruct the public, should be properly accomplished for the task, and should at least possess a good general knowledge of most of the popular arts and sciences, particularly natural history, philosophy, chemistry, and painting: he should also possess an enlarged and liberal mind.

There are many excellent narratives of voyages and travels extant, both in French and English, but my limits will allow me only to notice a few of the latter. The popularity of Anson's voyage has established its character, and that popularity (whoever was the writer whether Robins the engineer, or the chaplain, (whose name it bears) is not undeserved. It is clear and simple, and the story well told, without episode or superfluous description. Dr. Hawkesworth's voyages are more laboured, and more highly ornamented, but seem to want somewhat of that spirit which a writer who describes scenes in which he had been personally conversant would have infused into them. The simple tale of the illustrious Cook I relish better.

Among our principal travellers, his reputation obliges me to notice Mr. Addison, but it is extraordinary that he, who excelled in almost every other department of literature, should have failed in this. The rapid, yet dull narrative, is hardly enlivened by his beautiful classical quotations. I have seen it somewhere insinuated, that these were transcribed from an Italian author; but this I cannot believe; for few men were more conversant in the classics, or had more taste to relish their beauties, than Mr. Addison.

Bishop Burnet, though possessed of little original genius, is more entertaining as a traveller than even the great writer whom I have last mentioned. One advantage he had, in adopting the epistolary style, which always imparts an air of ease and sprightliness, and breaks the heavy uniformity of a continued narrative.

The letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, during her husband's embassy to the Porte, were evidently not written for publication, yet they have been long esteemed the happiest specimen extant of lively and entertaining narrative. Indeed it has by some been asserted that the composition was so excellent and correct that they could not have been written by a lady; this absurd calumny has, however, been amply refuted by the great talents displayed, particularly in prose composition, by the truly eminent female writers of the present day; and whoever has read the productions of a More, a Barbauld, a Williams, and a Hamilton, will not think it impossible that Lady Mary's letters should have been the production of a woman. The suspicion probably arose from a surreptitious edition of them having been printed some years ago by a notorious character of the name of Cleland, whose name was sufficient to bring suspicion on whatever he produced. The mistake is, however, now completely corrected by the publication of her whole correspondence and poems, in five volumes, under the sanction of her grandson, the present Marquis of Bute.

But the most elegant production that has ever adorned this walk of literature, is Dr. Johnson's Journey to

the Western Islands. It is more rich in sentiment than in description; and where the country supplies nothing to arrest the attention of his readers, his fertile mind more than supplies the deficiency. I cannot resist the temptation of transcribing one passage, which displays the author's address in introducing his own reflections, and his exquisite manner of imparting them. The passage relates to his first landing at Icolmbkill, the ancient seat of religion and learning. "We were now treading that illustrious island, which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge, and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish if it were possible. Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses, whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me, and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of *Marathon*, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of *Iona!*"

It would however be unreasonable to expect that every book of travels should be as highly finished as if it came from the accomplished pen of Dr. Johnson; that would be to lay an embargo upon much useful information. The simple, but admired narrative of Col. Stedman, never fails to interest or amuse.

There is one species of narrative which remains to be noticed. It might be classed as a kind of biography, but it is properly a work of imagination, I mean fictitious narrative. Respecting what is a mere exertion of fancy, scarcely any rules can be established, and in this respect even Aristotle's poetics have done more harm than good, particularly in the rules which he pretends to prescribe for dramatic poetry. So much must depend on the author's peculiar genius, the times in which

he lives, the subject he undertakes, and many other circumstances, that the only process I can properly adopt is to exhibit a short view of the principal writers in this class.*

Fictitious narrative would be of very remote date if we were to admit in our review those which class under the description of poetry. It would then include all the ancient ballads, and even epic poetry itself. But in the present letter I must confine myself to what is strictly prose.

I am disposed myself to place the Cyropædia of Xenophon in the class of fabulous narrations, though some have contended for it as a true history. It appears to me as a narrative intended to support a theory, like the Emilius of Rousseau, of which it undoubtedly serves as the model. The Ephesian Xenophon is the next who furnishes us with a specimen of this kind of writing; for his Ephesian or Loves of Atrocomus and Anthia is unquestionably a romance. The Ethiopics of Heliodorus, or Loves of Theagenes and Chariclea, is another production of the same description. The author is supposed to have been bishop of Tricca, in Thessaly, in the reign of Theodosius. I know of nothing of the kind amongst the Romans, unless we consider as such the obscene and nonsensical rhapsody of Petronius Arbiter.

What were the Milesian and Ionian tales it is impossible to say, as we have no remains of them extant; but in the East this kind of composition was composed probably very early (as I believe many pieces in the Sanscrit will testify), and among the Arabians certainly with great success, as instanced in the charming volumes of Arabian Nights Entertainments.

In all these Eastern productions there is a mixture of the mythology of the times; and the romances of the middle ages are marked by the same character, and

* Since writing the above, however, I have seen some excellent rules for novel writers in the second volume of Mr. Cumberland's Memoirs, p. 259.

might probably derive their origin from the Saracens, who a few years before had overrun a great part of Europe, and were masters of all the science and literature then extant in the world. The common subject of these performances is a long continued contest between a knight and a magician. The latter entangles the former in his spells, but the knight, through the assistance of his tutelary saint, and his mistress, is always ultimately victorious. I do not pretend to be conversant in this antiquated branch of reading. You will find the names of the most celebrated romances in Don Quixote, and, to say the truth, I could furnish you with nothing more.

To that incomparable performance let us therefore pass, for it gave a new direction to this fashion of writing, and was the first example of the humorous or satirical romance. Though intended chiefly as a burlesque on this species of writing, yet it contains many fine specimens of genius, independant of the original plan. There is in it some poetry not of the meanest description; and the stories of Dorothea, Cardenio, &c., afford perhaps the models of those affecting stories which have been produced by modern writers. I have read this delightful work more than once in the original. I must observe that no work loses so much by translation; it is impossible to transfuse the *curiosa felicitas* of the author, or the peculiar humour of Sancho, into any other language. To those also who have visited the country which the author describes, the work will have a double relish; for in many respects the manners and customs remain exactly the same, as well as the face of the country. I must add that I believe it is the first work of the kind that ever contained a strong delineation of character.

If the "Devil on Crutches" and "Gil Blas" are, as some have asserted, originally Spanish, the mantle of Cervantes seems to have been caught up by some kindred spirits. Admitting, however, that the hints might be taken from the "Diablo Cojuello," and "Don Guzman," yet it must be allowed that M. Le Sage has greatly improved upon his originals. He excels in the

delineation of character, especially in his Gil Blas, which perhaps is the first work extant in the line of fictitious narrative. But it is too generally known and admired to require either commendation or criticism.

Of the novels of Mr. Richardson I have little knowledge. They were too full of trite sentiment, and too tedious, to engage my attention in my youth, and I have not since attempted to read them. Persons of great judgment and taste, however, have agreed that the Clarissa of this author contains many fine passages, and some pathetic scenes worthy of the pen of the most accomplished tragic writer.

Le Sage seems to have been the model on which our admirable Fielding proceeded in this walk of literature. Yet his first essay in fictitious history, and perhaps his best, was originally designed as a burlesque upon the writings of Mr. Richardson, and particularly his Pamela. Perhaps no writer, not Shakspeare himself, has excelled Fielding in the delineation of character. Parson Adams, Barnabas and Trulliber, all three of the same profession, are equally striking, and yet so natural that though few have been ambitious of appearing in the latter characters, the candidates for the honour of representing Parson Adams have greatly out-numbered the cities which contended for the birth of Homer; and in my youth there was scarcely a village in England that did not claim for itself the credit of producing the original from which the portrait was drawn. Tom Jones, which by many is considered as Fielding's first performance, is in my opinion inferior to Joseph Andrews. Yet the characters of Squire Western, Partridge, Thwackum and Square, are admirable efforts of inventive genius. His Amelia seems a hasty performance, and is inferior to the other two, though the character of Justice Thrasher may class with any that has been drawn by the hand of this exquisite master.

Smollett, though not equal to Fielding, is yet possessed of a most excellent vein of humour. His characters are in general not quite so natural as those of Fielding; but we must except his sea personages, who are unri-

valled. Perhaps he is not quite equal to his great original, at least as far as respects Tom Jones, in the skill and address of conducting a plot, and winding it up in a dramatic manner; yet his novels never fail of exciting the most lively interest in his reader. Roderick Random is very superior to his Peregrine Pickle, independently of the gross deficiency in moral, which is a censure that justly attaches to the latter work. Indeed Tom Jones is in some measure culpable in this respect; for actual vice is treated too much as venial levity, and exhibited in too amiable and alluring a light not to be injurious to young readers. Humphrey Clinker, though it has little of plot or story, keeps attention alive by the constant display of odd characters well caricatured, and by an uninterrupted flow of genuine humour. No man can read these performances without regretting that the time and genius of Smollett, instead of pursuing a track for which he was so admirably adapted by nature, should have been wasted on the compilation of a dull, and in all respects very indifferent history.

The popularity of Sterne is so far passed away, that it seems like insulting the ashes of the dead to criticize him with severity. Under the class of fictitious narrative it seems as if we could only consider his Tristram Shandy; for in what view to regard the Sentimental Journey, whether as truth or fiction, is difficult to determine; nor does it much signify with respect to so contemptible a performance. I heard it once remarked of this work, "That the author seemed to have acted folly purposely for the sake of recording it." The first pages of his Tristram Shandy are a manifest theft from the Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. Indeed it has been proved that all his best passages are plagiarisms, of which however he made not the best use. I allow him all his merits when I say he had some turn for humour, some taste for the pathetic. But I am convinced that the ephemeral reputation of Tristram Shandy was much increased by the obscene allusions, and not a little by what Dr. Blair not unhappily terms "typographical figures."

On the modern productions in this walk of literature I am not, for many reasons, disposed to enlarge. I cannot however omit paying a just tribute to the merit of two female writers of the present day. Miss Burney, now Madame D'Arblay, is not without a portion of those talents which distinguished Smollett and Fielding, particularly the art of delineating character, with a better style; and the ingenuity of Mrs. Radcliffe cannot be too much admired, particularly in the happy solutions which she affords of those tremendous scenes of horror with which she so successfully agitates the feelings of her readers. The Cæcilia of the former, and the Mysteries of Udolpho of the latter, are, in my opinion, their best performances.

It would be trifling to take notice of the shoals of novels which are annually thrown out upon the public; they are the wretched productions of brain-sick females just escaped from boarding-schools, or of miserable garretteers, who want genius and learning to gain a livelihood in any other department of literature.

Of the serious productions termed novels, the Rasselas of Dr. Johnson deservedly holds the first place; and among the shorter tales, those in the Spectator, Guardian, Rambler, and Adventurer, are excellent. Perhaps one of the best told stories in our language is that of Fidelia in the Adventurer, by my late estimable friend Mrs. Chapone.

I cannot dismiss this subject without remarking on the excellence of one fictitious narrative, with which I know you to be well acquainted, I mean Robinson Crusoe. Admitting that the author might have received a hint from the adventures of Alexander Selkirk, the merit of the work is entirely independant to the outline of the story. It consists in the excitement which is afforded to industry, and the curious exercise of invention, exemplified in the various expedients of the hero for the supply of his necessities in the forlorn situation to which he is reduced. In this view the work is of inestimable value to the young; and not less so perhaps in the moral and religious reflections which are occa-

sionally interspersed. The delineation of the feelings of the unhappy exile, at certain periods, is the work of a master, and it is the more forcible because perfectly natural.

Shall I mention under this head that extraordinary performance, "Gulliver's Travels?" It was evidently begun as a *jeu d'esprit* in ridicule of Dampier's Voyages, and the rage for reading the most exaggerated accounts of foreign countries, which at that time prevailed. The author, however, at last extended it to a political satire, and even to a satire on human nature itself. The two first voyages to Lilliput and Brobdignag, undoubtedly display the fancy of the author to the highest advantage. There is something there in which the imagination of the reader can accompany that of the author. When he transforms men into horses, and horses into men, the fiction is too violent, and no picture can be formed in the mind to realize the description. Without this, every effort of imagination must fail in the effect; and I believe most writers turn with disgust from this part of the adventures of Gulliver. The voyage to Laputa, and the flying island, contains some excellent ironical animadversions on the science of his time, and I believe would even excite a smile in a mathematician. Yet more I apprehend might have been made of the subject in the hands of Swift, if he had possessed a more profound acquaintance with the subjects he ridicules, or been less in a hurry. What would Swift have done with the modern self-created philosopher? But the task has been executed with scarcely less spirit, and in a more engaging style, by my excellent friend Miss Hamilton, in her "Modern Philosophers."

It is evident that the epistolary style may be adapted to almost any of the departments of literature. In that may be taught all that is important in science and useful in life. A charming specimen we have of didactic epistles in the Letters of Lord Chesterfield to his Son; and of the narrative and descriptive in those already mentioned, of Lady Mary Wortley Montague. Its force in historical composition is happily exemplified by the

History of England in a series of letters, originally attributed to Lord Lyttleton, but really written by a man of superior genius, Dr. Goldsmith; and in biography, in a work undeservedly neglected, Lord Orrery's Letters on Swift.

Epistolary writing, however, in the common, and therefore the just acceptation of the word, is confined to those compositions which serve to transact the common business of life, or to promote its most pleasing intercourses. In this point of view letter-writing is the most necessary, at the same time it is happily the most easy, of all literary accomplishments. All that is necessary is some perspicuity in arrangement, and a style unblemished by glaring faults.

I have in general found one caution only necessary to young persons of a tolerable education, in order to enable them to write a good letter, and that is not to attempt to be fine; but to let the current of their thoughts flow naturally as they would in conversation, to endeavour to practice Swift's maxim of using "proper words in their proper places." Persons endued with much genius and fancy may play with metaphors and similies; but they must be managed with infinite address, not to destroy the simplicity, and even to obscure the spirit of a familiar epistle. I cannot in this place omit to mention a most excellent rule of Mr. Shenstone's, from which I have often profited; if you wish to answer a letter with spirit, answer it as soon as possible after you have received it.

When I speak of letters of business, I would not be understood to recommend the usual forms of mercantile correspondence. The are too technical, too full of expletives, and not always clear. The best rule for a business letter is, to express the object in as few words as possible, in plain but not vulgar phrascology; and this I am convinced any well-bred man, who has clear ideas of his subject, may easily do, only using the phraseology which commonly occurs in genteel society.

A letter of business is long or short according as the subject may require. On an occasion somewhat out of

the course of common affairs, there cannot be a finer specimen than the Epistle of Paul to Philemon, where there is not one redundant word, nor a sentence ill placed. But, without a prejudice from religion or education, St. Paul was the greatest master I have read, in all the excellencies of composition.

As it was very early necessary to men occaionally to communicate their thoughts to each other when separated by distance, examples of epistolary writing occur very early; there are several instances even in the Scriptures. The best collections of letters left us by the ancients are those of Cicero, Seneca and Pliny, all of them evidently written with a view immediate or remote to publication. The letters of Cicero are chiefly valuable as far as they are explanatory of events which occurred at a most important period of the history of Rome. They are the productions of an accomplished orator, who, however, from having been long in the habits of composition, probably wrote them with little previous study. But this must be admitted, that they are at least as highly polished as any other of his writings. Perhaps a man, who has a character at stake, ought not to be more slovenly in his letters than in any composition intended for the public.

Pliny is, I confess, a more interesting writer than Cicero, though he chiefly treats of domestic scenes, or matters of taste and literature. More is to be learned from him of the private life and manners of the Romans than from any other writer. The letters of Pliny are, however, more laboured than those even of Cicero; and I am inclined to think, that epistolary correspondence was at that period of infinitely more consequence than at present. As the art of printing was then unknown, it was one of the modes which men of talents adopted for conveying their sentiments to posterity; and as the learned and the great all corresponded with each other, letters upon interesting subjects were certain to be preserved by others, if not by the authors themselves. Thus Seneca's epistles are to be regarded as a collection of essays or treatises on moral and philosophical

subjects. They are however less read than they deserve. They contain a morality so pure and so sublime, that I am inclined to credit the opinion that the author was at heart a Christian. Besides this, you will find in them many excellent practical precepts for the regulation of the studies as well as the conduct of young persons. It is very remarkable that Seneca, who was the richest subject of his time, is in these letters continually declaiming in favour of poverty.

Among the French, Balzac and Voiture were long regarded as models of epistolary writing; but the former is pompous and inflated; and in the latter there is such a continual affectation of wit and quaintness, that I have seldom read any thing that appeared to me more disgusting. Madame Sevigny has also been much extolled; but I must differ from those who find much pleasure in drudging through the long series of her letters. I once attempted the task, but I found them so exquisitely trifling; so little of any thing to interest the understanding or to attract attention; such an accumulation of empty chit-chat and idle gossip, that I conceived the perusal of them to be an absolute waste of time. Our Lady Mary Wortley Montague is a writer of a superior cast. There is thought, and wit and genius in all her letters, whether she relates her travels, or treats of any subject of taste and literature.

Mr. Pope seems to have formed his epistolary style upon the model of Voiture. It is therefore no wonder that it should in some measure partake of the faults of that writer. Indeed all the brilliancy of Mr. Pope's style, (and no man ever possessed more powers of language than he did) cannot compensate for the studied sentences, and constant affectation of wit, which disfigure the correspondence of Mr. Pope. In fact his letters are by far the most inferior of all his productions. The letters of Dean Swift, Bishop Atterbury, Lord Bolingbroke, and Lord Peterborough, published in the same collection, are more natural, and consequently better.

A foolish passion lately prevailed for inspecting the private correspondence of every person who had attained either rank or fame. Now the private correspondence of any man, upon ordinary subjects, can afford but little interest. I confess I was disappointed even in the letters of Mr. Gibbon, and perhaps I should be equally so with those of Mr. Burke, or Dr. Johnson. A few very fine letters of the latter, it is true, are preserved, such as that to Lord Chesterfield, the Earl of Bute, &c. But these are written upon important occasions. The truth is, to make a composition perfect there must be subject, and the petty incidents of private life are not subjects that can be expected to engage much of public attention. It is different when the facts described are of general importance. Miss Williams's Letters on the French Revolution deservedly were much noticed, and will be long read, not merely because they are well written, but because the transactions they detail were of the utmost consequence in an historical point of view.

Dialogue is another *form* of writing. I use this expression, because it may be adapted to any subject, or almost any style. It is, however, a very clumsy mode of conveying either sentiments or facts. The dialogues of Plato may perhaps be excused, if we consider them (as perhaps we ought) transcripts of the delightful conversations of his incomparable master. The science of that period was almost entirely metaphysical. In the present state of things, when a world of facts is displayed to our view, it is therefore not extraordinary that they should be in general uninteresting. As a proof, the best translation of Plato would not at present have a sale.

Many of Cicero's philosophical and critical works are also in dialogue, but I think they would appear to at least equal advantage in a different form. A modern author of great wit and fancy, as well as learning, has also published his critical researches, under the title of Επτα πλησιον, in dialogue; but the wit and vivacity of

the writer enliven the subject, and reconcile us entirely to the manner and form.

It is upon ludicrous subjects, however, and where there is some display of character, that the dialogue form has been most happily employed. It becomes in this instance a kind of little drama. Lucian will be read with admiration and pleasure, as long as there is a relish for wit and fancy in the world. His πραξις των βιων (or sale of the philosophers), is the best of his dialogues. Lucian has been successfully imitated by Fenelon, and Lord Lyttleton.

LETTER XXIV.

DESCRIPTION AND ORIGIN OF POETRY.....METRE..... RHYME.....ENGLISH METRES.

MY DEAR JOHN,

HAVING endeavoured to present you with a critical view of the various forms of prosaic composition, I shall proceed without further preparation to the enchanting regions of poetry; a fairy land with which, however, you can only become properly acquainted by visiting it in person.

Dr. Blair observes, with some justice, that it is not easy to define "what is poetry;" and yet we may add there is no person of tolerable taste, and common attainments, who will mistake poetry for prose, or prose for poetry. It would be perhaps to speak more correctly to say, it is not easy to define the limits between poetry and prose; for as I have shewn that all good prose, and oratorical prose particularly, falls naturally into a kind of metre, or musical cadence; so, on the other hand, if we admit metre as an essential adjunct in the definition of poetry, there is a kind of low and colloquial poetry, which is almost prose, and is even little distinguished from it even by the metre; such is the iambic verse of our own, and even of the Greek tragedies. There are many long speeches in Shakspeare, which a mere auditor could not possibly distinguish from prosaic composition. A specimen occurs this instant to my memory. It is Hotspur's reply to the king's ambassador, Sir Walter Blunt....

"The king is kind, and well we know, the king
"Knows at what time to promise, when to pay....
"My father, and my uncle, and myself,
"Did give him that same royalty he wears:

" And when he was not six-and-twenty strong,
" Sick in the world's regard, wretched and low,
" A poor unminded outlaw sneaking home,....
" My father gave him welcome to the shore:
" And,....when he heard him swear, and vow to God,
" He came but to be duke of Lancaster,
" To sue his livery, and beg his peace;
" With tears of innocency, and terms of zeal,....
" My father, in kind heart and pity, mov'd,
" Swore him assistance, and perform'd it too.
" Now, when the lords and barons of the realm
" Perceiv'd Northumberland did lean to him,
" They more and less came in with cap and knee;
" Met him in boroughs, cities, villages;
" Attended him on bridges, stood in lanes,
" Laid gifts before him, proffer'd him their oaths,
" Gave him their heirs, as pages follow'd him,
" Even at the heels, in golden multitudes."

Perhaps, however, we shall be best enabled to define, or at least to understand the nature of poetry, by reverting a little to its origin. Poetry has certainly originated in that instinctive love of harmony and music, which is implanted in the whole human race. It is impossible to look back to any period of society for the first musical effusions. We find them among the savages of the lowest order, and we find them always there accompanied with words; for it is a depraved state of the public taste, when they attend to sound alone. This is the act of luxury and that sickliness of taste which perverts the very design of an art; and that of music was undoubtedly to give force and interest to sentiment and language.

Bishop Lowth has, with great labour, and not with less taste and discernment, traced the Hebrew poetry to a very early period of society;* to the exclamation of Lamech, the sixth from Adam, in the fourth chapter of Genesis, and also to the prophetic execration of Noah upon Ham. The inspired benedictions of the patriarchs

* See Lectures of the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, Lect. iv &c.

Isaac and Jacob, he proves to have been altogether of the same description; and, when we proceed a little further in the history of the Hebrew nation, we find the songs of Miriam and of Moses, who, it may be observed, was the reputed author of many of the Psalms now extant, and that of Deborah and Barak, &c. All these we know were adapted to musical notes, and there is undoubted evidence that a great part of the religious service of the Hebrews was performed by both vocal and instrumental music.

If we look into the history of other nations, we shall find all their early compositions to have been poetical, and actually *set* (as we should call it in modern language, perhaps *composed*) to music. Greece for successive ages was possessed of no records but the poetic. The laws themselves were metrical, as Aristotle proves by the very name *nomai* (laws) by which some of the early popular songs were distinguished. In short, the Germans, the Spaniards, and even the Swedes, had both their ancient records and their ancient laws in verse. A gentleman, who had seen more of savage life than any man I ever knew, assured me that all the savage nations had their songs adapted to a rude music; and that the common subjects of these songs were love and war.

Hence I think we have very clearly the origin not only of poetry, but even of numbers or metre. Music was early found to be the most fascinating vehicle for sentiment. The poetry was composed to the music, and not the music to the words, as in modern times. Hence the absolute necessity of *metre* or *rhyme*, or something which should correspond with the musical cadence; hence the invention of all the different ancient metres; and hence we may lay it down as a maxim that metre of some kind is essential to poetry.

The origin of poetry will explain to us the nature of the style which is appropriated to it, and indeed all its peculiar qualities. It was before men had learned to reason, that they applied themselves to poetry. There was therefore nothing for them to address but the sen-

ses and the passions. Music itself might almost be termed a sensual enjoyment; when with music therefore was combined all the information that men were capable of receiving in that stage of society, the heroic actions, or miraculous achievements of their ancestors, the entertainment must have been delightful. Still the expression must be such as to excite and engage the passions. The superstition always attached to so early a stage in the history of man, will also account for that alliance with the wonderful, the supernatural, which poetry has always claimed: and hence the origin of poetical machinery. The very poverty of language at this early period, aided by the vividness of an imagination that had none of the polished haunts of men to dwell *in*, and nothing but the solitude of woods and groves in which to rove, would naturally lead to a language and expression highly figurative and metaphorical.

Hence you have all the ingredients and characteristics of poetry; and hence it may be defined "a metrical composition chiefly addressed to the passions, occasionally enriched by machinery, or at least by the introduction of the supernatural, and expressed in *highly* figurative language."

This definition, however, though the best that I am able to offer in a general way, is still very imperfect, for it does not embrace what is almost the spirit and essence, of poetry. Since it is so difficult therefore to form a definition, let us seek for an etymology? A poem is the production of the imagination or fancy: hence it was originally termed *poema* (a creation) and the writers were called *poietai* (makers). Not that every thing contained in a poem was supposed to be a *new* invention, for that could not be true, and particularly of descriptive poems; but the composition as a whole might be regarded more strictly as an effort of the invention than the detail of facts or arguments, than the records of history, or the reasonings of the logician.

I have defined a poem to be a metrical composition; but I am not going to send you back to your grammar, to descant on the quantities of syllables, to give rules to

know a dactyl, a spondee, an iambic, &c. These you have already learned in your prosody. But there is one distinction between the ancient and modern languages, which it becomes necessary to point out. Harmony is an essential part of poetry; but the harmony of ancient and modern verse depends upon very different principles. The ancient languages were distinguished by what is called quantity; the same combinations of letters always formed either by long or short syllables; and by a certain arrangement of these the most perfect harmony could be produced. Modern languages, on the contrary, are defective with respect to the quantity of syllables, the same syllable being sometimes long and sometimes short. Some critics indeed have denied that we have any quantity at all, and say we have only accent, that is, a certain stress laid upon a particular syllable, as attribute, conjecture, complain, &c. In this however I do not coincide: for a perusal of our best prose writers will convince any one with a good ear that we have quantity, and that on the tasteful and musical admixture of long and short syllables much of the harmony of those writers depends; as I endeavoured to prove in a former letter. Whatever may be said of our iambics too, it must be allowed that we, as well as the French, have a dactyl measure, and Dr. Watts, as I recollect, has composed in it some short pieces without rhyme. Yet I must confess that, in the bulk of our poetry, and in our heroic verse in particular, more attention is given to accent than to quantity.

From these defects in our numbers, and to afford us that regular return of the same sound, which seems to constitute the music of verse, modern poets have called in the aid of rhyme; without which, whether it arises from habit or from principle, very little modern poetry can please, or satisfy the ear.

Our English verse then is regulated rather by the number of syllables than of feet, for you will find in what we call our iambic verse, very little attention is paid to the quantity of the syllables, and even some degree of negligence in this respect seems often to add to its beau-

ty and variety; and it depends for its harmony on the rhyme, and on the *pause*, which divides the line into two hemistichs or half verses, and seems to give the reader time to breathe, as

"Awake my St. John—leave all meaner things
"To low ambition—and the pride of kings;
"Let us—since life can little more supply,
"Than just to look about us—and to die,
"Expatiate free—o'er all this scene of man,
"A mighty maze—yet not without a plan."

Here the pause is finely varied, and the harmony complete, whereas in verse, where it falls too frequently in the same place, there is always a monotony, and consequently a tameness. It is only a good ear which, with proper practice can regulate this essential adjunct to good poetry.

Rhyme is not, however, an essential ingredient in English poetry, as the tragedies of Shakspeare, and the epic poems of Milton may satisfy you. It is then called *blank verse*, as wanting the rhyme. Whether blank verse or rhyme is to be preferred is still a matter in dispute among the critics. In tragedy it is certainly more natural, as approaching nearer to prose; but the few successful adventurers in blank verse in the other walks of poetry seems to form a presumptive argument against it. Milton himself appears to be supported rather by the grandeur and sublimity of his thoughts and language, than by the harmony of his numbers.

Our heroic poetry, whether in rhyme or blank verse, consists of ten syllables; and in rhyme, of couplets, or two lines rhyming to each other. Sometimes, however, a triplet is introduced, or an Alexandrine, or line of twelve syllables. You have an instance of both in these lines....

"Waller was smooth—but Dryden taught to join
"The varying verse—the full resounding line,
"The long majestic march—and energy divine."

The most frequent measure next to this in English poetry is that of eight syllables. This is often appropriated to ludicrous poetry, such as Hudibras, and most of Swift's humorous pieces, and the humour is often heightened by double rhymes. Take for example the first lines of Hudibras....

"When civil dudgeon first grew high,
"And men fell out they knew not why;
"When hard words, jealousies and fears,
"Set folks together by the ears,
"And made them fight like mad or drunk,
"For Dame Religion as for punk,
"Whose honesty they all durst swear for,
"Though not a man of them knew wherefore.
"When Gospel trumpeter, surrounded
"By long-ear'd rout to battle sounded;
"And pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,
"Was beat with fist, instead of a stick;
"Then did Sir Knight abandon dwelling,
"And out he rode a colonelling."

It is sometimes however used on more serious occasions, and seems well adapted to tender expression.

Both the ten and eight syllable verses are generally considered as iambics; but some short poems have only seven syllables, and these may be regarded as trochaic, with a long syllable or double rhyme at the close....

"Fill the bowl—with rosy wine,
"Round our temples—roses twine,
"Crown'd with roses—we contemn
"Gyge's—wealthy diadem. *Cowley.*

Many poems, and especially songs, in our language, are written in the dactyl or anapestic measure, some consisting of eleven or twelve syllables, and some of less. Of this measure we have a good specimen in Dr. Byrom's pretty pastoral, inserted in one of the volumes of the Spectator....

"My time, O ye Muses, was happily spent,
"When Phœbe was with me wherever I went," &c.

What I have said upon this subject will suffice to give you a general idea of metre, at least as far as respects our own poetry. I shall next call your attention to a higher subject, the thoughts and language of poetry. Though this letter is not so long as some that have preceded it, yet I think it will make a better division of the subject to conclude it here, than to enter upon a new and extended subject.

LETTER XXV.

THOUGHTS AND LANGUAGE OF POETRY.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I OBSERVED that my definition of a poem as "a metrical composition," &c. was, like most definitions, imperfect, for a poem was likewise to be considered as a high and vigorous effort of the imagination. In considering what is requisite to form a poet, both as to choice of subject, thought and language, I cannot do better than take for my text the well-known lines of Horace.....

> "Ingenium cui sit, cui mens divinior atque os
> "Magna sonaturum, des nominis hujus honorem."
>
> *Hor.* Sat. iv.

> "Creative genius and the power divine
> "That warms and melts th' enthusiastic soul;
> "A pomp and prodigality of phrase:
> "These form the poet."

There can be little doubt but the poet means by *ingenium* that strong power of mind which, as circumstances require, can form a fable, plot, or story, and ornament it with characters and circumstances; can create an imaginary land, and people it with imaginary beings; describe what he never saw, or add fancied embellishments to what he had seen.

The first and highest exercise of invention is in the choice and arrangement of the subject, and especially when that subject happens to be altogether fictitious. Yet judgment must here come in aid of fancy, and both must be united to form a perfect poet. There may be fancy without judgment; and in that case men write pretty

things, nay sometimes are brilliant; but they never accomplish what is truly great. It is impossible to be poetical without the subject admits of it; unless that is in itself interesting, all the pomp and ornaments of poetry and language will be lavished on it in vain. It would be making a statue of snow, and bestowing on it the art and genius and labour of a Phidias. If on the contrary the subject is well conceived, appropriate beauties will seem naturally to arise out of it, and the execution will be easy in proportion.

The man who attempted to turn the whole Bible into verse did not consider that the whole of the Bible is not poetical. Milton, on the contrary, seems to have chosen the only scriptural subject that afforded scope for imagination. The fall of our first parents was poetical in itself, and from an obscure passage in the Epistle of St. Jude, the vigorous fancy of Milton has formed the sublime episode of a war in heaven.

Trifling subjects, even in description, afford but little interest. A cowslip, a rose, or a snow-drop are beautiful objects; but the man who should write a long poem on any of them would seem to be trifling with his reader. I question, from this defect, whether "the Loves of the Plants" will live, though enriched with all the beauties of language, and with many new and brilliant thoughts. It was happily ridiculed in a burlesque poem, entitled "the Loves of the Triangles." I rejoice in the "Task" that produced such an effort from Mr. Cowper's genius; without its having been imposed he perhaps would not have written; but as it is, it must be rather considered as a farrago or collection of fine sentiments and episodes, than as a regular poem. Those subjects which excite most general interest will afford most pleasure, not only to the reader, but to the author himself; and be most prolific in excellencies and beauties. "Sentiments and descriptions (says Dr. Beattie) may be regarded as the pilasters, carvings, gildings, and other decorations of the poetical fabric; but human actions are the columns and rafters that give it stability and elevation."

Poetry has been called an imitative art, and so it may be considered in some degree. But though it is an imitation of nature, it must not be, like a Flemish painting, an imitation of nature in every particular. It should be (putting burlesque poetry out of the question for the present) an imitation of nature dignified and exalted, as far as the human imagination is capable of rising.

A fine poem may again be compared to a fine picture. It is to depict nature and hold her up to view; but there is no necessity to exhibit every thing in nature, or combine such actions as might possibly have existed together, though poetically inconsistent with each other. It is by not going beyond the bounds of probability, that in the intervals of some great event, a pert dialogue might take place between some of the lacquies of the palace, but no writer would introduce this into an epic poem.

What I observed in a former letter on the subject of amplification, is more strictly applicable to poetry than to any other kind of composition. The soul of poetry is detail, for it must ever be considered as a picture. The fairest mark indeed of a vigorous imagination is the power of displaying all the nice and discriminating features of the human character and passions. It shews penetration to observe them, fancy in being able to depict them, and judgment in selecting and arranging them. Shakspeare surpasses all mankind in this excellence; and in Milton, though his subject may seem unfavourable to such a display, the most enchanting passages are of this kind. How minute, and yet how interesting is the following scene, where Adam finds Eve asleep with unusual discomposure in her looks after her alarming dream....

"Now morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
"Advancing, sow'd the earth with orient pearl,
"When *Adam* wak'd, so custom'd, for his sleep,
"Was airy light from pure digestion bred,
"And temperate vapours bland, which th' only sound
"Of leaves and fuming rills, *Aurora's* fan,
"Lightly dispers'd, and the shrill matin song

" Of birds on every bough; so much the more
" His wonder was to find unwaken'd *Eve*
" With tresses discompos'd, and glowing cheek
" As through unquiet rest: he on his side
" Leaning half-rais'd, with looks of cordial love
" Hung over her enamour'd, and beheld
" Beauty, which whether waking or asleep,
" Shot forth peculiar graces: then with voice
" Mild, as when *Zephyrus* on *Flora* breathes,
" Her hand soft touching, whisper'd thus: awake
" My fairest, my espoused, my latest found,
" Heaven's last best gift, my ever new delight,
" Awake; the morning shines, and the fresh field
" Calls us; we lose the prime to mark how spring
" Our tended plants, how blows the citron grove,
" What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy reed;
" How nature paints her colours, how the bee
" Sits on the bloom, extracting liquid sweet.
" Such whisp'ring wak'd her, but with startled eye
" On *Adam*, whom embracing, thus she spake."

For the thoughts and ornamental part, poetry draws her resources from every quarter. In this view, if two men are equally gifted with the powers of fancy, he that knows most will be the best poet. The great reading of Milton serves constantly to enrich his poem, and keep alive the attention of his reader, by fine and vivid allusions and similies, and by occasional descriptions illustrative of his subject; and Shakspeare's rich mind derives embellishments from every thing in nature and art, by means of the slightest associations. There is a pretty thought in Don Quixote to this effect, which I formerly transcribed....

" La poesia, a mi paracer, es como una doncella tierna, y depoca edad, y en todo extremo hermosa, a quien tienen cuidado de enriqueceur, pulir & adorna otras muchas doncellas, que son todas las otras cientias, y ella ha de servir de todas, y todas se han de autorizar con ella."

" Poetry may be compared to a beautiful young female, attended by several other females, whose care and occupation it is to dress and adorn her; these she re-

gularly employs in her service, while they on their part derive credit and estimation from her."

To prescribe rules for the production of beautiful thoughts in poetry, would subject the empiric who made the attempt to well merited ridicule. Something of this kind was however attempted some years ago in Bysshe's Art of Poetry, where a kind of common-place book is exhibited of poetic ideas suited to a variety of subjects. The writer, however, who proceeded upon such a plan would be a plagiary and not a poet. It is extensive reading and observation that must treasure up a stock of materials, and it is genius alone that can form those fine, and fanciful, and striking combinations, that can enchant the reader. Unquestionably the taste, nay perhaps the imagination may be cultivated and improved; but this can only be done by reading most attentively the best models, discriminating, marking, and dwelling upon their beauties. Seneca, in one of his epistles, strongly recommends the reading over and over a few good books in preference to the busy and cursory perusal of many. To a young poet I am sure this is the soundest advice that can be given. The really good poets are few, and to these he ought to give such attention as to be master of their style of thinking, of every peculiar form in which they express themselves.

No critical rules can give genius. They are rather calculated to restrain and govern its eccentricities. They may prevent faults, but cannot invent beauties. Perhaps what I have observed on the sublime and pathetic may be of some use in pointing out the nature of these sources of fine thought; but what is the use of knowing from what country a valuable commodity is procured, unless you have the means of making it your own?

I shall therefore employ both my own time and yours better in pointing out some of the errors into which young writers are liable to fall, than in attempting to

"Write dull receipts how poems should be made."

1st. Every ornamental thought in poetry, should flow naturally out of the subject. It should not, in the hacknied phrase, "smell of the lamp." It should be a volunteer, not pressed into the service. In Virgil himself, whom as a poet I almost idolize, I seem sometimes to have discovered this fault. The beautiful lines, which on a former occasion I quoted from the 3d Georgic....

"Optima quæque dies," &c.

I have always thought misplaced, and much too good for the subject. But in inferior writers you will frequently find thoughts forcibly introduced as from a common place-book, which are very remotely connected with the subject.

In Shakspeare's Hamlet, the fine soliloquy "To be or not to be," &c. seems forced in, as there is no other part in the action where it is noticed that Hamlet entertained a notion of destroying himself, and it is altogether inconsistent with his engagements to the ghost of his father.

2d. Trite and common thoughts, or reflections, however moral they may be, instead of beauties are blemishes. In poetry we expect novelty and ingenuity both in thought and expression. When the poet says of Shakspeare....

"Each change of many colour'd life he drew,
"Exhausted worlds, and then imagin'd new:
"Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
"And panting Time toil'd after him in vain,"

We find not less of novelty than of grandeur in the image; and in this of Shakspeare....

"Cowards die many times before their deaths,
"The valiant never taste of death but once."

The sublimity of the thought is rather increased than diminished by the ingenious turn which is given to it.

Satan's address to the Sun in Milton is finely imagined, and the turn which is given to it, while it is highly in character, enlivens by a kind of emotion of surprise....

" O thou that with surpassing glory crown'd,
" Look'st from thy sole dominion like the God
" Of this new world, at whose sight all the stars
" Hide their diminish'd heads, to thee I call,
" But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,
" O Sun, *to tell thee how I hate thy beams*," &c.

To shew how vulgar and common images debase a subject, I need only quote the following lines from no less a poet than Dryden....

" The rage of jealousy then fir'd his soul,
" And his face kindled like a *burning coal*."
Palamon and Arcite, Book I.

Again....

" Nought profits him to save abandon'd life,
" Nor vomits upward aid, nor downward laxative." *Ibid.*

No man excelled Mr. Pope in ingenuity of thought....

" Friend to my life (which did not you prolong
" The world had wanted many an idle song)
" What drop, what nostrum can this plague remove;
" Or which must end me, a fool's wrath or love?"

" How can I Pulteney, Chesterfield forget,
" While Roman spirit charms, and Attic wit?"

" Is that too little? Come then I'll comply,
" Spirit of Arnall! aid me while I lie!
" Cobham's a coward, Polworth is a slave,
" And Lyttleton a dark designing knave," &c.

Yet Mr. Pope could write this execrable couplet....

" Grac'd as thou art with all the pow'r of words,
" So known, so honour'd in the house of lords."

3dly. However we may prize ingenuity of thought, too much caution cannot be exerted in avoiding conceit or affectation. One of the worst conceits upon record is that of Cicero, happily ridiculed by Juvenal....

" O fortunatam natam, me Consuli, Romam !"

" Fortune fortun'd the happy day of Rome,
" When I, her Consul sole, consol'd her doom." *Dryden.*

In the Troas of Seneca, which however contains some good passages, could we expect to find Hecuba lamenting the manner of her lord's death in two miserable puns....

" Ille tot regum parens
" Caret sepulchro Priamus, & flamma indiget
" Ardente Troja."

" The father of a race of kings
" Now lacks a grave, nor finds a fun'ral torch,
" While his whole city burns."

Among the conceits of modern poetry, I cannot but reckon a thought which has been admired, when the poet terms the evening dew

" The *tears* of the day for the loss of the sun."

You will find innumerable examples of this blemish in the learned criticisms of Martinus Scriblerus.

The LANGUAGE or dialect of poetry is essentially different from that of prose. This every person who reads it feels and acknowledges, though few are able to assign the reasons. They appear to me to result partly from poetry, being of a more durable character, and partly from whatever is addressed more to the passions than to the reason, requiring a higher colouring.

1st. The first remarkable difference between poetry and prose is, that the former admits of the use of words and expressions which in the latter would be accounted obsolete. This principally arises from the permanent

or stationary character of poetry. Milton, Shakspeare, and even Spencer may be still read with pleasure, while the prose writers of their time would scarcely be endured. The reason is plain....Prose in some measure imitates and depends on the style of conversation, and that is varying almost every day. We find expressions even in the Spectator, which from their having become colloquial would be accounted vulgar in any prose composition. Poetry survives these vicissitudes, and therefore many words in Shakspeare and Milton, which perhaps the age immediately succeeding would have regarded as low, are now consecrated by time.

A further reason why words almost obsolete are tolerated in poetry is, that they serve to raise it above common language, and therefore impart to it a kind of dignity and elevation. Mr. Gray, in one of his letters, selects from Dryden the following instances of poetical licence in the revival of old words and phrases....

"Full of *museful mopings*; unlike the *trim* of love; a pleasant *beverage*; a *roundelay* of love; stood silent in his *mood*; with *knights* and *knaves* deformed; his *boon* was granted; *wayward* but wise; *furbished* for the field; *doddered* oaks; *disherited*; *smouldering* flames; *retchless* of law; *crones*, old and ugly; the *beldam* at his side; *villainize* his father's fame." Mr. Gray himself indeed affords us, through the whole of his poems, happy examples of this liberty when under the controul of taste, serving to elevate the diction of poetry....as "*ruthless* king; scatter'd wild *dismay*; *shaggy* steep; wound his *toilsome* march in long *array*."

Dr. Beattie also notes the following expressions as being peculiar to poetry....amain, annoy (a noun), anon, aye (ever), behest, blithe, brand (sword), bridal, carol, dame (lady), fell (adj.), gore, host (army), lambkin, lay (poem), lea, glade, gleam, lore, meed, orisons, plod (to travel laboriously), ringlet, rue and ruth, spray (twig), steed, stfain, strand, swain, thrall, thrill, troll, wail, welter, warble, wayward, woo, the while, yon, of yore.

He adds the following, as not being in so common use....appal, arrowy, attune, battailous, breezy, car, cla-

rion, cates, courser, darkling, flow'ret, emblaze, circlet, impearl, shadowy, streamy, troublous, madning, viewless, clang, clangor, choral, bland, dire, ensanguin'd ire, ireful, lave (to wash), nymph (a lady), orient, philomel, jocund, rapt, redolent, refulgent, vernal, zone, sylvan, suffuse.

Yet there is a medium to be observed in the use of antiquated phraseology; and Mr. Pope's advice on this subject should be in the mind of every poet.....

> "Be not the first by whom the new are try'd
> "Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

Dr. Beattie observes, that "a word which the majority of readers cannot understand without a glossary, may be considered as obsolete." But this rule is too indefinite, and it would perhaps be better to draw a line of demarcation, and to say that a word or phrase which has not been in use since the time of Shakspeare inclusive, should be considered as inadmissible.

2dly. Some of our poetical words take an additional syllable, as dispart, distain, enchain, &c: While others are made shorter, as vale, trump, clime, submiss, drear, dread, helm, morn, mead, eve and even, 'gan, illume, ope, scape, &c.

3d. Certain abbreviations, and particularly the cæsura, by which a letter is cut off from the beginning and end of a syllable, are admissible in poetry, which are not allowable in prose.....such as 'tis true, o'er, e'er ne'er, &c.

> "'Twas on a lofty vase's side." *Gray.*

The cæsura is instanced in the following line from the same exquisite poet....

> "T' alarm th' eternal midnight of the grave."

4th. Poetry admits of a bolder transposition of words than prose. This would be better exemplified from

the Greek and Roman classics than from our own; yet even among our English writers some bold, and almost violent transpositions may be found; and particularly in Milton.

5th. The "os magna soniturum" must not be forgotten in poetry. Where a word therefore may be made to have a fuller and more impressive application, that form should be in general preferred. Thus, instead of the adjective the participle is frequently employed; as for various, varying. In the same manner poetry transforms nouns into verbs and participles; as from the noun hymn, the poets have made a verb, to hymn; from picture, "the pictured walls;" from cavern, "the cavern'd roofs," &c.

6th. The soul of poetry is particularizing and bringing to view the minute circumstances which give "a local habitation and a name" to the subject, and animation to the picture.

"Musis amicus, tristitiam et metus
"Tradam protervis in mare CRETICUM
"Portare ventis." *Hor.*

"While in the muses' friendship blest,
"Nor fear nor grief shall break my rest;
"Bear them ye vagrant winds away,
"And drown them in the Cretan sea." *Francis.*

"Full *ten* years slander'd, did I once reply?
"*Three thousand suns* went down on Welsted's lie."

Had the poet only said that "he had been long calumniated without replying, and that much time had passed before he noticed the slanderous falsehood of Welsted," it is evident that the thought would have wanted all that force and beauty which it derives from the happy expression of Mr. Pope.

It is for the same reason, namely, to give life to the picture, that poetry often uses a periphrasis, rather than a plain and simple description. Two lines of Virgil will give you a sufficient idea of this....

" Depresso incipiet jam tum mihi taurus aratro
" Ingemere, et *sulco attritus splendescere vomer.*"

" Then with the crooked plough the steers shall groan,
" And the keen share shall brighten in the furrow."

Again in the 2d Æneid....

" Vertitur interea cœlum, et ruit oceano nox."

" Now had the sun roll'd down the beamy light,
" And from the caves of ocean rush'd the night."

7th. Poetry admits of more and stronger figures than prose; and particularly the prosopopeia. Thus Milton, describing the song of the nightingale, says " Silence was pleased;" and on the approach of morning....

" Now morn her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
" Advancing, sow'd the earth with orient pearl."

The morning is a favourite topic with poets. Some will perhaps prefer to the imagery I have just now quoted, that of Shakspeare....

" But look the morn in russet mantle clad,
" Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill." *Hamlet.*

But perhaps the most beautiful instance in our language of this fine figure is in the incomparable address to light in the opening of the third book of Paradise Lost; where, I may add, in little more than fifty lines you will find almost every poetical beauty concentrated.

8th. Epithets are allowed in greater abundance in poetry than in any description of prose, without excepting oratory itself. Even compound epithets are sometimes necessary adjuncts in poetry, though I do not know any case where they can be legitimately admitted in prose. Such phrases as cloud-capt, many-twinkling, heaven-kissing, spirit-stirring, heaven-taught, bright-

haired Vesta, vale-dwelling lily, would be wholly inconsistent with the gravity and sobriety of prose.

In the same "pomp and prodigality of phrase," poets frequently employ what I may call a string of epithets, while humble prose shrinks almost from the dangerous application of even a single one. Thus Virgil....

" Monstrum *horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum*.....*Æneid III.*

" A monster *grim, tremendous, vast* and *high*,
" His front *deform'd*, and *quench'd his blazing eye*." *Pitt.*

" And the plain ox,
" That *harmless, honest, guileless* animal,
" In what has he offended." *Thomson.*

There is not however a more delicate part of the poet's task, nor one that requires more caution, than the use of epithets. Unless they tell something, add something to the picture, they are mere expletives, cold, and insipid. If again they are mean or colloquial, they debase the subject. In the following lines you see both these faults exemplified....

" The chariot of the King of kings,
" Which *active* troops of angels drew,
" On a strong tempest's *rapid* wings,
" With *most amazing* swiftness flew."
Tate and Brady.

Epithets also sometimes obscure the sense, by crowding too many thoughts or ideas together. A judicious poet will therefore never introduce an epithet, but when it is wanting, or when it adds something to the sense, by its sublimity or novelty.

9th. After all, the distinguishing character of poetry, as far as regards the style, lies more in the rejection than in the adoption of particular phrases or forms of speech. Whatever is technical, common, or colloquial, is inconsistent with the " os magna soniturum." I must except the ludicrous, where the phraseology can scarce-

ly be too common or vulgar, if happily introduced, as the readers of Hudibras and Peter Pindar must continually experience. But where dignity is expected, a phrase, though not low, or vulgar in itself, yet being common in prose writing or conversation, will commonly degrade. Two instances from a good writer will serve to convince you....

" A tribe who *singular* religion love,
" And haunt the lonely coverts of the grove."
Rowe's Lucan.

" It look'd as fortune did *in odds* delight,
" And had in cruel sport ordain'd the fight." *Ibid.*

I must add another example where the word is not exceptionable in itself, for it is a word that must be used; but it is here introduced in a common colloquial way....

" He copies from his master Sylla *well*,
" And would the dire example far excel.
Rowe's Lucan.

Mark with what different effect the same little, and really mean word, is introduced by the taste of Pope, even at the end of a line....

" If such there be, who lov'd so long, so *well*,
" Let him our sad, our tender story tell.
" The well-sung woes will soothe my pensive ghost;
" He best can paint them who shall feel them most."
Eloisa.

I cannot conclude this branch of my subject better than with a quotation from Dr. Johnson's Life of Dryden, which says almost every thing that can be said upon it.

" There was, before the time of Dryden, no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of dometic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts. Words too

familiar or too remote, defeat the purpose of a poet. From those sounds which we hear on small or coarse occasions, we do not easily receive strong impressions or delightful images; and words to which we are nearly strangers, whenever they occur, draw that attention to themselves which they should convey to things.

"These happy combinations of words, which distinguish poetry from prose, had been rarely attempted; we had few elegancies or flowers of speech; the roses had not yet been plucked from the bramble, or different colours joined to enliven one another."....JOHNSON'S DRYDEN.

I do not conceive that much advantage can arise from an endeavour to class or to describe the different styles appropriate to each peculiar kind of poetry. Almost every subject, and every good author, will have a peculiar style; and no man of any taste would compose a pastoral in the style of Paradise Lost, or an heroic poem in that of Horace's epistles, or Swift's verses to Stella. Critics, however, have agreed to distinguish the gradations of poetical language into the sublime, the middle, and the plain or simple styles. Milton and Gray may be cited as examples of the first. Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock, and his satires, for the Eloisa is of a sublimer character, may be referred to the second. The plain or simple style is almost wholly confined to songs and pastorals; but we have in English, though the Greeks and Romans had not, a low and familiar style, which is applicable to subjects of humour and burlesque, where cant phrases, proverbs and expressions peculiar to certain trades are introduced; such is the poem of Hudibras, many of Swift's satirical pieces, the burletta of Midas, and many similar dramatic productions.

LETTER XXVI.

THE EPIGRAM AND EPITAPH....THE SONNET....PASTORAL POETRY....THEOCRITUS.....VIRGIL.....SPENCER..... PHILLIPS....GAY....SHENSTONE.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN treating of the different forms of poetical productions, I might have adopted a general division, similar to that in which I arranged compositions in prose. They might in general be classed under the didactic, and the narrative and descriptive; and I might shew that each of these requires a distinct style, as well as a different arrangement from the other. But as the different kinds of poetry have been, almost from the first cultivation of the art, distinguished by peculiar names, I shall be more generally understood if I adopt no new arrangement, and describe them under those characters by which they have been known for ages.

The ancient critics enumerated seven distinct classes or kinds of poetry: the epigram, the elegy, the bucolic or pastoral, the lyric, the satyric, the dramatic, and the epic. It is wonderful that though they had the works of Hesiod before them, and afterwards the incomparable Georgics, and Art of Poetry of Horace, they should have omitted so important a class as the didactic. Of poetry professedly descriptive the ancients had indeed almost none; nor till the time of Phædrus, scarcely any tales or fables in verse. The modern epitaph may also be considered as a new species of poetry, unless it may be regarded as a kind of short elegy; for it cannot properly class with the epigram, either according to the ancient or modern acceptation. The sonnet is also an entire modern invention, unless it is regarded as a short ode.

I must therefore adopt a new classification, and as it has been usual to begin with the lighter and more trifling kinds of poetry, I shall treat of them in the following order: 1st. The epigram; 2d. the epitaph; 3d. the sonnet; 4th. pastoral; 5th. didactic poetry; 6th. satire; 7th. descriptive; 8th. elegy; 9th. lyric poetry; 10th. the drama; and lastly, epic or heroic poetry.

I. The word EPIGRAM means an inscription, from the Greek preposition *επι*, upon; and *γραμμα*, a writing; having been generally engraven or written on pillars, porches, or the pedestals or bases of statues. The modern sense is somewhat different. It now means a short and witty poem, the point or humour of which is expressed in the latter lines. Yet even in the Greek epigrams (properly so called) or inscriptions, there was a terseness and point approaching to the modern idea. Such was the famous inscription on the statue of Venus by Praxiteles....

Γυμνην οιδε Παρις με, και Αγχισης, και Αδωνις,
Τους τρεις οιδε μουνος πραξιλης δε ποθεν?

"Thrice by three mortals was I naked seen,
"But were unrob'd with this vile artist been."

Mr. Prior has very happily extended this thought in the following pretty little poem, which has the true spirit of the epigram....

"When Chloe's picture was to Venus shewn;
"Surpriz'd the goddess took it for her own.
"And what said she does this bold painter mean?
"When was I bathing thus, and naked seen?
"Pleas'd Cupid heard, and check'd his mother's pride;
"And who's blind now, mamma? the urchin cried.
"'Tis Chloe's eye, and cheek, and lip and breast,
"Friend Howard's genius fancied all the rest."

By the way, while I am speaking of inscriptions, I must mention a very good couplet, written I believe by Mr. Pope, and engraven on the collar of a dog belonging to the late Princess Dowager of Wales....

" I am her Highness' dog at Kew....
" Pray tell me, Sir, whose dog are you?"

Another extempore epigram by the same hand will give a good idea of this kind of poem. It was written on glass with the diamond pencil of the late Lord Chesterfield....

" Accept a miracle, instead of wit;
" See two dull lines with Stanhope's pencil writ."

Martial is the author among the ancients whose poems approach the nearest to the modern idea of epigram. Those of Catullus I do not account such, though they go by that name. Several of Martial's have wit, though many of them appear to be merely short complimentary poems, such as are many of Waller, Cowley, Prior, and our other English *poetæ minores*, modern and ancient.

The following will serve to give you an idea of the wit of Martial....

" Petit Gemellus nuptias Maronillæ,
" Et cupit, & instat, et precatur, & donat.
" Adeone pulchra est? Immo fædius nil est,
" Quid ergo in illa patitur & placet? Tussit."

" Curmudgeon the rich widow courts,
" Nor lovely she, nor made for sports;
" 'Tis to Curmudgeon charm enough,
" That she has got a church yard cough."

" Ad cœnam nuper Varus me fortè vocavit,
" Ornatus dives parvula cœna fuit.
" Auro, non dapibus, oneratur mensa ministri
" Apponunt oculis plurima, pauca gulæ.
" Tunc ego non oculos, sed ventrem pascere veni:
" Aut appone dapes, Vare, vel aufer opes."

" With lace bedizen'd comes the man,
" And I must dine with Lady Ann.
" A silver service loads the board,
" Of eatables a slender hoard.

" Your pride and not your victuals spare ;
" I came to dine, and not to stare."

" Cum sitis similes, paresque vitæ,
" Uxor pessima, pessimus maritus,
" Miror, non bene convenire vobis."

" Alike in temper and in life,
" A drunken husband, sottish wife,
" She a scold, a bully he....
" The devil's in't they don't agree."

" Callidus imposuit nuper mihi caupo Ravennæ,
" Cum peterem mixtum, vendidit ille merum."

" A landlord of Bath put upon me a queer hum,
" I ask'd him for punch, but the dog gave me mere-rum."

" Non amo te, Sabidi, non possum dicere quare,
" Hoc tantum possum dicere, non amo te."

" I do not like thee Dr. Fell,
" The reason why I cannot tell ;
" But I don't like thee Dr. Fell."

" Quem recitas meus est, Fidentine, libellus ;
" Sed male cum recitas, incipit esse tuus."

" The verses, friend, which thou hast read, are mine ;
" But as thou readst them, they may pass for thine."

" Texatus pulchre rides mea, Zoile, trita ;
" Sunt hæc trita quidem, Zoile, sed mea sunt."

" You're fine, and ridicule my thread-bare gown ;
" Thread-bare indeed it is....But 'tis my own."

I have inserted so many specimens not only to introduce you to an author, who is seldom read in schools, but to prove what to me is very clear, that the modern notion of epigram is taken from these lively and pointed sallies of Martial, from whom I might have extracted many more. You will see from these, and what have preceded, that an epigram (in the modern sense) is no more than a witticism in verse ; and almost any good jest or repartee put into verse will make an epigram.

This being the case, since wit is more particularly the characteristic of the British islands than of any other nation, it is no wonder that the English language should abound in excellent epigrams. A great number will be found in all good poetical selections, particularly in that by Dr. Knox, under the name of Elegant Extracts. The Earl of Rochester wrote some good epigrams. That in which he so happily characterized Charles II. is admirable; but Prior is perhaps the best writer of epigrams in our language. Some entire poems may be regarded as altogether epigrammatic. Such are many of Swift's, the satires of Dr. Young; and Dr. Goldsmith's Retaliation, is as a series of epigrams from the beginning to the end, as well as an ode to Pinchbeck, published some years ago. I shall add one or two from memory, which I believe are not to be found in the collections.

Soon after the affair of Lord Keppel, and the victory of Sir George Rodney, the corporation of London voted the freedom of the city to the former in a box of heart of oak, and to the latter in a gold box. The following epigram appeared in the newspapers.....

"Each admiral's defective part,
"Satyric cits you've told;
"The cautious Lee-shore wanted heart,
"The gallant Rodney gold."

The receipt tax, which was at first very obnoxious, was introduced in the time of the famous coalition ministry (that of Lord North and Mr. Fox), and the following epigram was on that occasion handed about....

"Premier, says Fox, let's have a tax
"That shall not fall on me....
"Right, says Lord North, we'll tax receipts,
"For these you never see."

I add one from a deservedly popular collection of poems, published by a friend of mine, under the quaint and homely title of Salmagundi.

Written after hearing a dull sermon from a dignitary of the church, on the words "watch and pray."

"By our pastor perplext,
"How shall we determine?
"'Watch and pray' says the text,
"'Go to sleep' says the sermon."

Though the epigram is in general applicable to topics of mirth and gaiety, yet even the most serious subjects have sometimes been agreeably presented in this form. The old French epigram on the fasts of the Romish church is striking. It is thus Englished, I believe, by Swift....

"For who can think with common sense,
"A bacon slice gives God offence?
"Or that a herring has a charm
"Almighty vengeance to disarm?
"Wrapt up in majesty divine,
"Does he regard on what we dine?

But there is something approaching the sublime in the following of Dr. Doddridge on the motto to his own arms....

"Dum vivimus, vivamus."

"Live while you live, the epicure would say,
"And grasp the pleasures of the passing day:
"Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,
"And give to God each moment as it flies....
"Lord, in my view let both united be!
"I live in pleasure, while I live to thee."

Even a good pun may constitute the basis of an epigram, though such will not bear Mr. Addison's test of translation. One example will suffice.

To a bad fiddler.

"Old Orpheus play'd so well, he mov'd Old Nick;
"But thou mov'st nothing but thy fiddle-stick."

II. The EPITAPH is nearly allied to the epigram, and has a similar derivation from the Greek ἐπὶ & τάφος, meaning literally an inscription on a tomb. Like the epigram too it was originally very simple in its structure, consisting often of only a single line, or even of a few words, which served to attract the notice of the passenger, and to pay him the customary compliment of wishing him well; as if the deceased had been alive and meeting him, saluted him in the usual manner. Like the epigram, however, the epitaph soon assumed a kind of pointed or witty construction. Perhaps it is natural in every one who writes a short poem of any kind to endeavour to conclude with something impressive.

I do not however think those the best epitaphs which conclude epigrammatically, and still less wittily. Prior's, as well as Gay's, are faulty in this respect. The latter affects something serious it is true....

"Life's but a jest, and all things shew it....
"I thought so once, but now I know it."

But Prior's is too light and trivial for a Christian cathedral, where all should be solemn and suited to the place; calculated to remind us of our mortality, and inspire us with pious sentiments....

"Monarchs and courtiers, by your leave,
"Here lies the bones of Matthew Prior;
"The son of Adam and of Eve;
"Let Bourbon or Nassau go higher."

I cannot even pass without blame, on this account, Mr. Pope's celebrated epigram on Sir Isaac Newton....

"Nature, and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
"God said, let Newton be, and all was light."

This is a mere epigram. Dr. Johnson censures very justly the mixture of two languages on the tomb of Newton, and criticizes the Latin; but I really think the

Latin preferable to the English. The thoughts in both are borrowed.

It is not easy to establish any rules for an epitaph, because it must vary according to the person and circumstances; yet a few general precepts may be recommended....1st. The *name* of the person intended should be always introduced, which in verse is not easy, and is too commonly omitted; 2d. Something of the character of the deceased should be introduced, but with as little flattery as possible. Indeed, if the character of the deceased is not given, the epitaph is not his, but will serve for any body; 3d. The *place* in which epitaphs are usually inscribed ought never to be forgotten, and for this reason every thing light and trifling should be avoided. Where is the excellence of that epitaph recorded by the Spectator?....

> " Here lies the body of John Saul,
> " Spital-fields weaver....and that's all."

It is a poor conceit founded on a kind of disappointment to the reader, without imparting any instruction whatever, and calculated to raise a laugh in that place, and on that occasion, where risibility must be most improper.

In truth I have seen few good epitaphs. Those of Mr. Pope are, on the whole, the best; and yet whoever will read the criticisms of Dr. Johnson on them, as annexed to some editions of the Idler, and to his Life of Pope, will see the difficulty which attends this species of composition. These criticisms are in general extremely judicious; but I cannot help remarking one error, into which I could scarcely believe Dr. Johnson could have fallen. It is on the epitaph on Gay, which the critic seems to have treated throughout with unusual severity. This is the line....

> " In wit a man, simplicity a child."

Dr. Johnson seems to have taken the word *wit* in the common acceptation at present, whereas it is evidently used in the old acceptation for *genius* (esprit)....

" True wit is nature to advantage drest,
" What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd."

But if it is the " wit of a man" to which the critic objects, he ought to have known that " a man" used in this kind of connexion means the perfection of human nature....

" Where ev'ry god did seem to set his seal,
" To give the world assurance of a man,"
Shakspeare.

In such a country, says a French writer, I found statesmen, in another soldiers; but in England I found *men*.

In our language epitaphs are not necessarily in rhyme, though the language is generally poetical, or very near it. Some of the best, at least the most appropriate, are in this kind of poetical prose.

The fulsome panegyric with which epitaphs too commonly abound, is happily ridiculed in the following, by Mr. Pope....

" To the Memory
OF
SIGNIOR FIDO,
An *Italian* of good Extraction:
Who came into *England*,
Not to bite us, like most of his Countrymen,
But to gain an honest Livelihood,
He hunted not after Fame,
Yet acquir'd it;
Regardless of the Praise of his Friends,
But most sensible of their Love.
Tho' he liv'd amongst the Great,
He neither learnt nor flatter'd any Vice.
He was no bigot,
Though he doubted of none of the 39 Articles.
And, if to follow Nature,
And to respect the Laws of Society,

Be Philosophy,
He was a perfect Philosopher;
A faithful Friend,
An agreeable Companion,
A loving Husband,
Distinguished by a numerous Offspring,
All which he lived to see take good Courses.
In his old Age he retired
To the House of a Clergyman in the Country,
Where he finished his earthly Race,
And died an Honour and an Example to the whole Species.
Reader,
This Stone is guitless of Flattery,
For he to whom it is inscribed
Was not a MAN,
But a
GREY-HOUND."

III. The SONNET is entirely a modern invention; it is borrowed both in its nature and form from the Italian: it means a little song. The original form was fourteen lines, and this is still preserved in what are esteemed true sonnets; but many short poems in different forms are now called sonnets. Indeed the artificial form of the original sonnet is by no means suited to the genius of our language. The frequent recurrence of the same rhyme fatigues the ear, while it comes also in an unexpected and unusual manner, so as to disappoint the reader who is accustomed to more perfect harmony.

IV. PASTORAL poetry is of very ancient date. Bishop Lowth, in his Lectures on Sacred Poetry, proves that the pastoral tate was diffused among all the poetry of the Hebrews; and I think Michaelis styles it botanical poetry, so prevalent in it are the ideas attached to rural life. Pastorals are in different forms: sometimes in that of a simple ballad, or popular song, which is indeed the most natural, easy, and pleasant. Those of the Greeks and Romans were, however, mostly in heroic measure, and in dialogue. Theocritus called his pastorals Idyllia; and I think from εἶδος, a form or representation, or as we would say in English, a "Picture of Rural Life." Virgil adopts the general title Bucolics,

for his songs of the herdsmen, and singly he terms them Eclogues, that is, *select* poems.

The pastoral may embrace any subject of rural life ....A shepherd lamenting the loss of his mistress; a contest between rural swains; a moral lesson; and some writers have even elevated the eclogue to the sublimest subjects, as Mr. Pope in his Messiah, which is a happy imitation of Virgil's Pollio. English wit has even given us a specimen of the burlesque Idyllium, of which we have most pleasant specimens in Mr. Gay's pastorals, and in some more recent publications.

Thus embracing so wide a range of subject, scarcely any rules or principles can be established for the eclogue. The quality which most critics have agreed in recommending is simplicity. Theocritus adopted the Doric dialect, which being the rustic dialect of Greece, is regarded as a recommendation of his Idylliums. I am apprehensive, however, that if an English writer of pastorals was to reduce his language to the level of husbandmen or rustics, he must entirely depart from the poetic dialect, and consequently all the charm would be lost. It must indeed be confessed that modern pastorals composed on the ancient plan are exceedingly uninteresting; and they can only be supported by fine and lively description, or rather should be considered as the vehicle of it.

Theocritus lived at a period when mankind had scarcely emerged from the pastoral state (almost 300 years before Christ), and in a country, Sicily, which existed by rural occupations. Every thing therefore conduced to give popularity to his productions, as adapted to the times in which they were composed. Virgil, and the modern writers of pastoral, were altogether differently situated. They described scenes which no longer existed, and which consequently wanted that interest which the first readers of Theocritus experienced. Indeed they became mere imitators of him. This is notoriously the case with Virgil, except in his first eclogue, which being founded on an incident in his own

life, contains all the force and beauty of an original composition from the hand of so great a master.

The pastorals of Theocritus then, are chiefly valuable as exhibiting a picture of the remote age in which the poet lived. Those of Virgil (except the first and the fourth), are chiefly estimated for some fine passages which they contain. The modern pastorals (strictly so called) as they present no pictures at all analogous to modern life or manners, and are mere imitations of Theocritus and Virgil, excite but little interest. Few at present, I believe, read the pastorals of Spencer or of Phillips, and even the charm of Mr. Pope's versification would scarcely now afford popularity to his pastorals, were they not supported by the excellence of his more mature productions.

That I may not however dismiss the subject without something of example, I shall select a few passages from Virgil's 3d Eclogue, and to afford a specimen at the same time, of the burlesque pastoral, I shall shew in what manner they have been imitated, or rather travestied by Mr. Gay. The subject is a poetical contest between two shepherds....

VIRGIL.

" Quis fuit alter
" Descripsit radio totum qui gentibus orbem?
" Tempora quæ messor, quæ curvus arator haberet?

GAY.

" From Cloddipole we learnt to read the skies,
" To know when hail will fall, or winds arise.
" He taught us erst the heifer's tail to view,
" When stuck aloft, that show'rs would straight ensue:
" He first that useful secret could explain,
" That pricking corns foretold the gath'ring rain.
" When swallows fleet soar high and sport in air,
" He told us that the welkin would be clear."

VIRGIL.

Dam...." Vis ergo inter nos, quid possit uterque vicissim
" Experiamur? Ego hanc vitulam, ne forte recuses,
" Depono."

Men...." Id quod multo tute ipse fatebere majus,
" Insanire libet, quoniam tibi pocula ponam
" Fagina," &c.

GAY.

Cuddy...." I'll wager this same oaken staff with thee,
" That Cloddipole shall give the prize to me."

Lobbin Clout...." See this tobacco pouch, that's lin'd with hair,
" Made of the skin of sleekest fallow deer:
" This pouch, that's ty'd with tape of reddest hue,
" I'll wager that the prize shall be my due."

VIRGIL.

Dam...." Triste lupus stabulis, maturis frugibus imbres,
" Arboribus venti: nobis Amaryllidis iræ."

Men...." Dulce satis humor, depulsis arbutus hædis,
" Lenta salix fœto pecori: mihi solus Amyntas."

GAY.

Lobbin Clout...." Leek to the Welsh, to Dutchmen butter's dear,
" Of Irish swains potatoes are the cheer;
" Oats for their feasts the Scottish shepherds grind,
" Sweet turnips are the food of Blouzelind:
" While she loves turnips, butter I'll despise,
" Nor leeks, nor oatmeal, nor potatoes prize."

Cuddy...." In good roast-beef my landlord sticks his knife,
" A capon fat delights his dainty wife;
" Pudding our parson eats, the squire loves hare,
" But white-pot thick is my Buxoma's fare.
" While she loves white-pot, capon ne'er shall be,
" Nor hare, nor beef, nor pudding, food for me."

VIRGIL.

Pal...." Non nostrum inter vos tantas componere lites:
" Et vitula tu dignus & hic: & quisquis amores
" Aut metuet dulces, aut experitur amaros,
" Claudite jam rivos, pueri, sat prata biberunt."

GAY.

Cloddipole...." Forbear, contending louts, give o'er your strains;
" An oaken staff each merits for his pains.

" But see the sun-beams bright to labour warn,
" And gild the thatch of Goodman Hodges' barn.
" Your herds for want of water stand a-dry;
" They're weary of your songs....and so am I."

The ballad is the sweetest and most natural medium in which pastoral ideas can at present be conveyed. Perhaps the charming Idyllium of Bion, on the death of Adonis, may not improperly fall under this description. If it does not, I know not under what class to rank it; but this I know, that a more beautiful poem does not exist, either for pathetic expression or simplicity of thought: and therefore not to have noticed it would have been unpardonable. We have many beautiful compositions of this kind in our language. Gay, Cunningham, Rowe, and Shenstone have all left specimens of the pastoral ballad, but that of Mr. Shenstone, in four parts, is generally esteemed the best. It is all beautiful, and I may select at random; the following lines are from that portion which the author entitles Hope....

" One would think she might like to retire
" To the bow'r I have labour'd to rear;
" Not a shrub that I heard her admire,
" But I hasted and planted it there.
" O how sudden the jessamine strove
" With the lilac, to render it gay!
" Already it calls for my love,
" To prune the wild branches away.
" From the plains, from the woodlands and groves,
" What strains of wild melody flow!
" How the nightingales warble their loves
" From thickets of roses that blow!
" And when her bright form shall appear,
" Each bird shall harmoniously join
" In a concert so soft and so clear,
" As....she may not be fond to resign."

The chief difficulty I have intimated in pastoral, consists in finding such subjects and materials as may render them interesting. With this view, some modern poets have formed them into a kind of dramatic per-

formance, and this may be considered as the highest improvement of pastoral poetry. Of this kind is the Aminta of Tasso; it abounds in tenderness, but has also too much of the Italian refinement and quaintness.

Guarini's Pastor Fido is a drama of the same kind, and is by some more admired than the Aminta; but, in my opinion, they are both greatly surpassed by the production of a Scottish bard; I allude to Allen Ramsay's Gentle Shepherd. It may want the dignity of the Arcadian scene, but there are in it descriptions and sentiments which would do honour to any poet. The Scottish dialect, in which it is written, gives it all the advantage of the Doric numbers, which was the original language of pastoral. It has besides interest and pathos; the plot is good, the characters well drawn, and the whole drama is conducted with singular address and effect.

LETTER XXVII.

DIDACTIC, SATYRIC, AND DESCRIPTIVE POETRY...HESIOD.....LUCRETIUS.....VIRGIL.....HORACE....BOILEAU.... POPE....RAPIN....MASON....AKENSIDE....ARMSTRONG.... JUVENAL.....BUTLER.....YOUNG....DRYDEN.....PRIOR..... DENHAM.....JAGO.....GOLDSMITH.....ROSCOE.....PLEASURES OF MEMORY.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I NOW proceed to my fifth division, and have placed didactic, or as some have called it, preceptive poetry, lower on the scale than descriptive, elegiac, and lyric poetry; not because it is of less consequence, but because (if I may be indulged in a little harshness of expression) it is less *poetical*. The preceptive muse has indeed been termed pedestrian, while her other sisters are furnished with wings, or mounted on the sabled courser, and thus are feigned to scale the heights of Parnassus, while she continues to wander at the bottom, or the side. Not that the moral poems of Horace, Juvenal, Pope, and Johnson; the Georgics of Virgil, or the Essay on Criticism, can be compared, in point of real importance, with the elegies of Tibullus, or the odes even of Gray; it is as poems only, and not as lessons of instruction, that they are assigned the inferior station.

With respect, however, to the poetical beauties of which a didactic composition may be susceptible, very much will depend upon the nature of the subject. If it relates to rural affairs, there is room for much elegant description; and if the subject is moral, it will admit of all the embellishments which may be derived from the delineation of the human character and passions.

Didactic poetry embraces a vast scope of subject, for indeed it may be applied to almost any; but these subjects may in general be classed under three heads: 1st. The arts; 2d. Philosophy and science; and 3d. Morals.

Thus on the arts we have Horace, Vida, Boileau, Roscommon, and Pope on poetry and criticism, with some of inferior note; Du Fresnoy on the art of painting; Mason's English Garden; and in agriculture Hesiod, Virgil, and others.

In philosophy and science, Lucretius; Armstrong on health; Akenside's pleasures of imagination.

In morals the didactic poems are innumerable.

To poems of the two first classes, the rules laid down in treating of didactic compositions in prose will generally apply. As the poet's object, however, is in a great measure to please and entertain, it is unnecessary that he should pursue so exact a methodical arrangement as where a work is meant for instruction only. A writer of taste will also select such parts of his subject as are most likely to captivate the fancy and command attention. He may also enliven it not only with splendid figures, but with pleasing episodes, which serve to relieve the attention, and enliven the gravity of precept. Of all these excellencies we have a most striking example in the Georgics of Virgil. But it requires uncommon powers of mind, great extent of knowledge; and above all, fancy and taste, to render any poem of this description tolerable.

Before I proceed to the third class, moral poems, I shall briefly notice a few of the principal writers in the two first divisions.

The first didactic poem extant was undoubtedly Hesiod's Ἔργων καὶ Ἡμερῶν, "Of Works and Days." I read it attentively in early life, but I believe few will read it a second time for the sake of the poetry; yet there are many more elegant productions which I would rather see destroyed than this. It is a most singular compound, with little regard to method, of moral observations, of economical instructions, and georgical precepts. It affords a truly interesting picture of man's

first emergence from a state of barbarism; and you see the shepherd of Helicon first introducing his half-barbarous neighbours into something like the manners of civilized life. I can have no question, from the internal evidence, but that Hesiod preceded Homer; and no man can have a correct idea of the very early state of Greece without reading his poems. Let me now observe (as I shall have no opportunity of noting again his Theogonia), I have no hesitation in believing Hesiod, if not altogether, at the least, *almost* the *inventor* of the mythology of the Greeks. He had probably collected some dark hints from tradition of the true theology, and still more probably had some knowledge of the Hebrew writings. From these, in part accommodated to the popular superstitions, he appears to have formed his Theogonia. Herodotus positively declares that he and Homer were "the first who gave names to the gods."

The next didactic poem of any consequence is that of the Roman poet Lucretius, "De Natura Rerum." Philosophy is, however, a subject that accords but ill with poetry; and I can give little commendation either to the reasoning or the numbers of Lucretius. He has however some fine passages. The introduction is beautiful, and particularly the following lines....

"Te, Dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila cœli,
"Adventumque tuum; tibi suaves dædale tellus
"Summitit flores; tibi rident æquora ponti,
"Pacatumque nitet diffuso lumine cœlum."

"At thy approach the raging tempests fly;
"Nor clouds nor mists deform the azure sky;
"For thee the earth is deck'd in varying hues,
"And the gay flow'rs refreshing scents diffuse.
"Through thee each creature feels the genial ray,
"And the calm'd heavens disclose a brighter day."

The description of the plague at Athens is a very fine digression, I might say episode, if that phrase might be applied to any part of a didactic poem; and

there are occasionally some fine ideas cloathed in spirited language; but on the whole Lucretius is a tedious writer, and as the philosophy is good for nothing, few will take the trouble to read him for a few original conceptions and brilliant thoughts poetically expressed. I can say nothing of the Astronomicon of Manilius, having never read it.

The incomparable Georgics present themselves next in order for our consideration, and they may be regarded as a model for didactic composition. The author was indeed happy in his subject; for a dissertation on rural employments and affairs affords more scope than any other for beautiful and luxuriant description; but the fine imagination, and luxuriant and vivid style of Virgil, could give enchantment to almost any subject. The plan is sufficiently regular for the conveying of all necessary instruction, while the poem is every where enlivened by animated description, splendid allusions, or interesting narrations. I need only mention his description of the perpetual spring in Italy, and of the Scythian winter; of the happiness of a country life; of the prodigies that foretold the death of Cæsar; of the murrain among the cattle; his interesting account of the bees; and the beautiful episode, if I may again borrow this expression from epic poetry, of Orpheus and Eurydice. The whole too is enriched with apt allusions to the fables of antiquity, and adorned with a felicity of expression which Virgil only could give. It is unnecessary to add more upon so popular a work, especially as I know you to be not cursorily acquainted with it.

Horace's Art of Poetry is confessedly of so irregular a fabric, that critics are divided on the point whether it is an essay on poetry in general, or only a criticism on the state of dramatic poetry at that time. To me it has always appeared to consist of detached remarks upon poetry in general, written with the usual ease and spirit of the author, and seems in some measure connected with the Epistle to Augustus. Bishop Hurd's remarks upon this poem, which made some noise when first published, (probably as from the hand of a bishop) are

entirely borrowed from a foreign critic. Though inferior to his moral epistles and satires, the Ars Poetica contains many excellent precepts, and very many lively and spirited thoughts.

Vida has imitated Horace with more of regularity, but less of spirit. The poem is, however, not destitute of merit. It has been elegantly translated by Mr. Hampson, a gentleman who has evinced considerable powers on other occasions. The translation is introduced by a most ingenious and handsome dedication to a prelate now alive.

Boileau's Art of Poetry is upon a still more regular plan than that of Vida; and, as far as French versification will admit, is a most excellent poem. Boileau's Art of Poetry may be read with great advantage by most young writers, as far as critical rules can come in aid of genius; there is nothing against which we can with propriety take exception, and I do not know that he has omitted any of the critical precepts of antiquity.

Mr. Pope's Essay on Criticism resembles more the Art of Poetry of Horace than either of those last mentioned. It is full of genius, full of pointed and useful reflections, but deficient in method. In excuse for this, we must properly recur to the nature of the subject. Criticism, as a science, cannot be reduced to rule, at least without applying it to every department of literature. It was therefore the author's design rather to elicit a few principles and precepts for the *moral* conduct of critics, than to establish a system. But in whatever light we may regard it as a scholastic treatise, the Essay on Criticism is certainly *a poem*....a poem abounding in beauties, parts of which are continually quoted as authority by every person of taste. If the early age of the writer (twenty years) is considered, it must be accounted an unexampled production.

Dr. Johnson observes of it...." If he had written nothing else, it would have placed him among the first critics, and the first poets; as it exhibits every excellence that can embellish or dignify a didactic composition." Dr. Johnson adds (in particularizing the beau-

ties of this poem) "That the comparison of a student's progress in the sciences to that of a traveller in the Alps, is perhaps the best that English poetry can shew." I cordially agree with our great critic in condemning what the poet has urged with respect to the sound being an echo to the sense, as the weakest part of the poem.

Rapin's Poem on Gardening I have never seen. Du Fresnoy's Poem on Painting I have read in the original, and in Dryden's and Mason's translations; but it has only served to confirm my opinion respecting the great difficulty of making a didactic poem interesting. Mr. Mason's English Garden perhaps will rank most properly as a descriptive poem.

Dr. Akenside, in his Poem on the Pleasures of the Imagination, has attempted to blend philosophy with criticism. It is taken, as you have probably observed, from Mr. Addison's papers in the Spectator on the same subject. It is however but little read at present, and the reason is, that it possesses more the language than the spirit of poetry.

Dr. Armstrong's Essay on Health can scarcely be called a poem. It may be sound doctrine in some instances in a medical point of view; but if it would pass on an examination at the college of physicians, or at Surgeon's-hall, I am confident it never would at the court of Parnassus. If the Economy of Love, by the same author, may be considered as a didactic poem, it reflects equal disgrace on the poet and the man.

The third class of didactic poems, those on moral subjects, presents an unbounded field for admiration, perhaps for criticism, and includes some of the most engaging and beautiful productions of human genius. It is at an advanced period of society that moral science assumes any thing like a body or a form. Men have long learned to act, before they have learned to think and reason upon human actions and characters. We have therefore scarcely any thing in remote antiquity which deserves the title of a moral poem. The golden verses of Pythagoras (if really his) are only detached maxims, like those of Rochefoucault, but without

their point, and deserve only to be hung up with King Charles's golden rules.

When philosophy had made some progress, and men began to mark the causes and motives of human action, and to reason upon character; then the muse of ethics discovered the natural connection between sentiment and poetry, and found that verse was the most delightful medium through which the praises and the precepts of virtue might be conveyed. In the regions of sentiment no track or limits can be described. Ethic poetry may assume almost any form, either as a formal essay, or a light and familiar epistle. It can rise to the superior heights of Parnassus, for there is no finer scope for human genius than the passions and actions of mankind, nor any subject that can be equally interesting.

If the Proverbs of Solomon, his Ecclesiastes, &c. may be ranked as poetry, of which I think there is satisfactory evidence in Bishop Lowth's Lectures, then we must admit that ethical poetry is of very ancient date indeed. But among the heathen writers I do not find that I am warranted in going further back than Horace. With most extensive reading, and, what is better, with an exquisite knowledge of mankind, with an imagination, perhaps inferior only to Shakspeare or Pope, and with that *curiosa felicitas* of language, so justly remarked of him by Petronius, it is not wonderful that Horace should have surpassed all that went before, and most that have followed, in the line of moral poetry. Most of those which he calls satires, and the bulk of his epistles, are admirable moral essays in verse. If I possess any knowledge of human nature, any insight into the principles of human action, I must acknowledge myself indebted for them to the Bible and Horace. The 1st and 2d satire of the first book; the 2d of the second book; the 1st, 2d and 6th epistles, are incomparable specimens in this line of composition. Let me indulge in a few quotations from the first epistle, with Mr. Pope's most happy translation, the only man who could translate Horace with sufficient spirit....

" Ut nox longa, quibus mentitur amica, diesque
" Lenta videtur opus debentibus : ut piger annus
" Pupillis, quos dura premit custodia matrum :
" Sic mihi tarda fluunt ingrata tempora quæ spem
" Consiliumque morantur agendi graviter id quod
" Æque pauperibus prodest, locupletibus æque,
" Æque neglectum pueris, senibusque nocebit."

" Long as to him, who works for debt, the day,
" Long as the night to her, whose love's away,
" Long as the year's dull circle seems to run,
" When the brisk minor pants for twenty-one :
" So slow th' unprofitable moments roll
" That lock up all the functions of my soul :
" That keep me from myself; and still delay
" Life's instant business to a future day;
" That task, which as we follow or despise,
" The eldest is a fool, the youngest wise.
" Which done, the poorest can no wants endure;
" And which not done, the richest must be poor.

The following lines, though not so immediately applicable to our subject, and preceding those I have quoted, are a pleasant delineation of character, and shew (among many other proofs), the author's reading in the moral writings of the philosophers....

" Quo me cunque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes,
" Nunc agilis fio, et mersor civilibus undis,
" Virtutis veræ custos, rigidusque satelles;
" Nunc in Aristippi furtim præcepta relabor;
" Et mihi res, non me rebus, subjungere conor."

" But ask not, to what doctors I apply;
" Sworn to no master, of no sect am I :
" As drives the storm, at any door I knock;
" And house with Montague now, and now with Locke;
" Sometimes a patriot, active in debate,
" Mix with the world, and battle for the state;
" Free as young Lyttleton her cause pursue,
" Still true to virtue, and as warm as true :
" Sometimes with Aristippus and St. Paul,
" Indulge my candour, and grow all to all :
" Back to my native moderation slide,
" And win my way by yielding to the tide."

The following is in a higher strain....

" Fervet avaritia, miseroque cupidine pectus?
" Sunt verba et voces, quibus hunc lenire dolorem
" Possis, et magnam morbi deponere partem.
" Laudis amore tumes? sunt certi piacula quæ te
" Ter pure lecto poterunt recreare libello.
" Invidus, iracundus, iners, vinosus, amator,
" Nemo adeo ferus est, ut non mitescere possit,
" Si modo culturæ patientem commodet aurem.
" Virtus est vitium fugere, et sapientia prima
" Stultitia caruisse," &c.

" Say does thy blood rebel, thy bosom move
" With wretched av'rice, or as wretched love?
" Know, there are words and spells, which can controul
" Between the fits this fever of the soul:
" Know there are rhymes, which fresh and fresh apply'd,
" Will cure the arrant'st puppy of his pride.
" Be furious, envious, slothful, mad, or drunk,
" Slave to a wife, or vassal to a punk,
" A Swiss, a High-Dutch, or a Low-Dutch bear:
" All that we ask is but a patient ear.
" 'Tis the first virtue vices to abhor;
" And the first wisdom to be fool no more," &c.

" Hic murus aheneus esto
" Nil concire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa."

" True, conscious honour is to feel no sin,
" He's arm'd without that's innocent within;
" Be this thy screen, and this thy wall of brass," &c.

The satires of Juvenal are improperly called such, for few of them are personal, or of a ludicrous description; but he perhaps called his moral essays satires, in imitation of Horace. The 10th satire is almost a perfect example of the moral didactic. It is a regular discourse on the folly (or as Dr. Johnson more properly perhaps translates it, the vanity) of human desires. Dr. Johnson's imitation of this satire is (to say the least of it) not inferior to any of those of Mr. Pope. Take the the following as examples....

" Da spatium vitæ, multos da Jupiter annos!
" Hoc recto vultu, solum hoc et pallidus optas.
" Sed quam continuis et quantis longa senectus
" Plena malis! Deformem, et tetrum ante omnia vultum.
" Dissimilemque sui, deformem pro cute pellem,
" Pendentesque genas, et tules aspice rugas,
" Quales umbriferos ubi pandit Tabraca saltus
" In vetula scalpit jam mater simia bucca.
" Plurima sunt juvenum discrimina, pulchrior ille
" Hoc atque ille alio: multum hic robustior illo,
" Una senum facies, cum voce trementia membra,
" Et jam leve caput, madidique infantia nasi,
" Frangendus misero gingiva panis inermi.
" Usque adeo gravis uxori, natisque, sibique,
" Ut captatori moveat fastidia Cosso.
" Non eadem vini atque cibi, torpenti palato,
" Gaudia.——————Aspice partis
" Nunc damnum alterius. Nam quæ cantanti voluptas,
" Sit licet eximius citharædus, sive Seleucus,
" Et quibus, aurata mos est fulgere lucerna?
" Quid refert magna sedeat qua parte theatri,
" Qui vix cornicinos exaudiet, atque tubarum
" Concentus? Clamore opus est, ut sentiat auris,
" Quem dicat venisse puer, quot nuntiit horas
" Præterea minimus gelidi jam corpore sanguis
" Febre calit sola: circumsilit agmine facto
" Morborum omne genus, quorum si nomina quæras,
" Promptius expediam, quot amaverit Hippia mœchos;
" Quot Themison ægros autumno occiderit uno,
" Percurram citius quot villas possideat nunc,
" Quæ tondenti gravis juveni mihi barba sonabat,
" Ille humero, hic lumbis, hic coxa debilis; ambos
" Perdidit ille oculos, et luscis invidet. Hujus
" Pallida labra cibum capiunt digitis alienis.
" Ipse ad conspectum cœnæ deducere rictum
" Suetus, hiat tantum, ceu pullus hirundinis, ad quem
" Ore volet pleno mater jejuna. Sed omni,
" Membrorum damno major dementia, quæ nec
" Nomina servorum, nec vultum agnoscit amici,
" Cum quo præterita cœnavit nocte, nec illos
" Quos genuit, quos eduxit. Nam codice sævo
" Hæredes vetat esse suos; bona tóta feruntur
" Ad Phialem. Tantum artificis valet halitus oris,
" Quod steterat multis in carcere fornicis annis,
" Ut vigeant sensus animi; ducenda tamen sunt
" Funera patrum, rogus aspiciendus amitæ
" Conjugis et fratris, plenæque sororibus urnæ

" Hæc data pœna diu viventibus, ut renovata
" Semper clade domus multa in luctibus, inque
" Perpetuo mœrore et nigra veste senescant."
Juv. Sat. x. l. 245.

" Enlarge my life with multitude of days,
" In health and sickness, thus the suppliant prays;
" Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know
" That life protracted....is protracted woe.
" Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,
" And shuts up all the passages of joy:
" In vain their gifts the bounteous seasons pour,
" The fruit autumnal, and the vernal flower;
" With listless eyes the dotard views the store,
" He views and wonders that they please no more,
" Of all the tasteless meats and joyless wines,
" And luxury with sighs her slave resigns.
" Approach, ye minstrels, try the soothing strain
" And yield the tuneful lenitives of pain,
" No sound, alas! would touch the impervious ear,
" Though dancing mountains witness Orpheus near.
" Nor lute nor lyre his feeble power attend,
" Nor sweeter music of a virtuous friend;
" But everlasting dictates crowd his tongue,
" Perversely grave, or positively wrong.
" The still returning tale, and ling'ring jest,
" Perplex the fawning niece and pamper'd guest;
" While growing hopes scarce awe the gath'ring sneer,
" And scarce a legacy can bribe to hear;
" The watchful guests still hint the last offence,
" The daughter's petulance.....the son's expense,
" Improve his heady rage with treach'rous skill,
" And mould his passions till they make his will,
" Unnumber'd maladies his joints invade,
" Lay siege to life, and press the dire blockade;
" But unextinguish'd av'rice still remains,
" And dreaded losses aggravate his pains;
" He turns, with anxious heart and crippl'd hands,
" His bonds of debts and mortgages of lands;
" Or views his coffers with suspicious eyes,
" Unlocks his gold, and counts it till he dies.
" But grant the virtues of a temp'rate prime
" Bless with an age exempt from scorn or crime,
" An age that melts in unperceiv'd decay,
" And glides in modest innocence away;
" Whose peaceful day benevolence endears,
" Whose night congratulating conscience cheers,

" The gen'ral fav'rite as the gen'ral friend,
" Such age there is, and who would wish its end?
" Yet ev'n on this her load misfortune flings,
" To press the weary minutes' flagging wings;
" New sorrow rises as the day returns,
" A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns,
" Now kindred merit fills the sable bier,
" Now lacerated friendship claims a tear:
" Year chases year, decay pursues decay,
" Still drops some joy from with'ring life away;
" New forms arise, and different views engage,
" Superfluous lags the vet'ran on the stage,
" Till pitying Nature signs the last release,
" And bids afflicted worth retire to peace."

Of these lines it is hard to say which are to be preferred, the original or the imitation. The original has more of satire, the imitation more of dignity. In the following the imitation is so much more concentrated, and on the whole so superior, that I omit transcribing the original....

" The teeming mother, anxious for her race,
" Begs for each birth the fortune of a face;
" Yet Vane could tell what ills from beauty spring,
" And Sedley curs'd the form that pleas'd a king.
" Ye nymphs of rosy lips and radiant eyes,
" Whom pleasure keeps too busy to be wise;
" Whom joys with soft varieties invite,
" By day the frolic, and the dance by night;
" Who frown with vanity, who smile with art,
" And ask the latest fashion of the heart;
" What care, what rules, your heedless charms shall save,
" Each nymph your rival, and each youth your slave?
" Against your fame, with fondness hate combines,
" The rival batters, and the lover pines.
" With distant voice neglected virtue calls,
" Less heard and less, the faint remonstrance falls:
" Tir'd with contempt she quits the slipp'ry reign,
" And pride and prudence take her seat in vain;
" In crowds at once, where none the pass defend,
" The harmless freedom and the private friend.
" The guardians yield by force superior ply'd,
" By int'rest, prudence; and by flatt'ry, pride:
" Now beauty falls betray'd, depis'd, distrest,
" And hissing infamy proclaims the rest."

Boileau's satires in general may be classed among moral poems, for the writer was too courtly to lash individual vice. They are chiefly copied from Horace and Juvenal; and the remark of Warburton is perfectly true, that "Mr. Pope called his satires imitations, while the French poet dignified his imitations with the name of satires."

In our language we have several fine didactic poems of the moral kind; but none are more celebrated than Mr. Pope's Essay on Man, and his Moral Essays. In the former the poet has aimed at being methodical; but I perfectly agree with Dr. Johnson, that the metaphysics are execrable, while the morality is pure, and sometimes sublime, the knowledge of human nature it displays profound, and the poetry incomparable.

There is extant a posthumous work of Lord Bolingbroke, purporting to be the substance of several conversations between him and Mr. Pope, the object of which is to prove that the whole matter of the Essay on Man was dictated by his lordship, while Mr. Pope was little more than a versifier. To me it appears that the work in question was rather taken from the Essay on Man than the Essay from it; and neither Lord Bolingbroke nor Mr. Pope was the author of the system on which it is founded; for it is undoubtedly borrowed altogether from King's Origin of Evil: a work abundantly ingenious, but fallacious in its principles, and inaccurate in its conclusions.

The best passages in the Essay on Man are the delineations of character, and of these there are none finer than the following:

"Honour and shame from no condition rise;
"Act well your part, there all the honour lies.
"Fortune in men has some small diff'rence made,
"One flaunts in rags, one flutters in brocade;
"The cobler apron'd, and the parson gown'd
"The friar hooded, and the monarch crown'd.
"'What differ more (you cry) than crown and cowl?'
"I'll tell you, friend! a wise man and a fool.
"You'll find, if once the monarch acts the monk,
"Or, cobler-like, the parson will be drunk,

" Worth makes the man, and want of it the fellow ;
" The rest is all but leather, or prunella.
" Stuck o'er with titles, and hung round with strings,
" That thou may'st be by kings, or whores of kings ;
" Boast the pure blood of an illustrious race,
" In quiet flow from Lucrece to Lucrece :
" But by your father's worth if yours you rate,
" Count me those only who were good and great.
" Go ; if your ancient, but ignoble blood,
" Has crept through scoundrels ever since the flood,
" Go ! and pretend your family is young ;
" Now own your fathers have been fools so long.
" What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards ?
" Alas ! not all the blood of all the Howards.
" Look next on Greatness ; say where Greatness lies ?
" ' Where, but among the heroes and the wise ?'
" Heroes are much the same, the point's agreed,
" From Macedonia's madman to the Swede ;
" The whole strange purpose of their lives, to find
" Or make, an enemy of all mankind !
" Not one looks backward, onward still he goes ;
" Yet ne'er looks forward further than his nose.
" No less alike the politic and wise ;
" All sly slow things, with circumspective eyes :
" Men in their loose unguarded hours they take,
" Not that themselves are wise, but others weak.
" But grant that those can conquer, these can cheat ;
" 'Tis phrase absurd to call a villain great :
" Who wickedly is wise, or madly brave,
" Is but the more a fool, the more a knave.
" Who noble ends by noble means obtains,
" Or, failing, smiles in exile or in chains,
" Like good Aurelius let him reign, or bleed
" Like Socrates, that man is great indeed.
" What's fame ? a fancy'd life in others' breath,
" A thing beyond us, ev'n before our death.
" Just what you hear, you have ; and what's unknown,
" The same, (my Lord) if Tully's, or your own.
" All that we feel of it begins and ends
" In the small circle of our foes or friends :
" To all beside, as much an empty shade,
" An Eugene living, as a Cæsar dead ;
" Alike, or when, or where, they shone, or shine,
" Or on the Rubicon, or on the Rhine.
" A wit's a feather, and a chief a rod ;
" An honest man's the noblest work of God.

" Fame but from death a villain's name can save,
" As justice tears his body from the grave;
" When what t' oblivion better were resign'd,
" Is hung on high, to poison half mankind.
" All fame is foreign, but of true desert;
" Plays round the head, but comes not to the heart:
" One self-approving hour whole years outweighs
" Of stupid starers, and of loud huzzas;
" And more true joy Marcellus exil'd feels,
" Than Cæsar with a senate at his heels.
" In parts superior what advantage lies?
" Tell (for you can) what is it to be wise?
" 'Tis but to know how little can be known;
" To see all others' faults, and feel our own:
" Condemn'd in bus'ness or in arts to drudge,
" Without a second or without a judge.
" Truths would you teach, or save a sinking land?
" All fear, none aid you, and few understand.
" Painful pre-eminence! yourself to view
" Above life's weakness, and its comforts too.
" Bring then these blessings to a strict account;
" Make fair deductions; see to what they mount:
" How much of other each is sure to cost;
" How each for other oft is wholly lost:
" How inconsistent greater goods with these;
" How sometimes life is risk'd, and always ease:
" Think, and if still the things thy envy call,
" Say, wouldst thou be the man to whom they fall?
" To sigh for ribands if thou art so silly,
" Mark how they grace Lord Umbra, or Sir Billy.
" Is yellow dirt the passion of thy life?
" Look but on Gripus, or on Gripus' wife.
" If parts allure thee, think how Bacon shin'd,
" The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind:
" Or ravish'd with the whistling of a name,
" See Cromwell, damn'd to everlasting fame!
" If all, united, thy ambition call,
" From ancient story learn to scorn them all.
" There, in the rich, the honour'd, fam'd, and great,
" See the false scale of happiness complete!
" In hearts of kings, or arms of queens who lay,
" How happy those to ruin, these betray!
" Mark by what wretched steps their glory grows,
" From dirt and sea-weed as proud Venice rose;
" In each how guilt and greatness equal ran,
" And all that rais'd the hero, sunk the man.

" Now Europe's laurels on their brows behold,
" But stain'd with blood, or ill exchang'd for gold:
" Then see them broke with toils, or sunk in ease,
" Or infamous for plunder'd provinces.
" Oh wealth ill-fated! which no act of fame
" E'er taught to shine, or sanctify'd from shame!
" What greater bliss attends their close of life?
" Some greedy minion, or imperious wife,
" The trophy'd arches, story'd halls invade,
" And haunt their slumbers in the pompous shade.
" Alas! not dazzled with their noon-tide ray,
" Compute the morn and ev'ning to the day;
" The whole amount of that enormous fame,
" A tale, that blends their glory with their shame!"

The last lines from 285 are exquisite.

In the Moral Essays the story of Sir Balaam is excellent, and incomparably told. The Essay on the Characters of Women is far superior to both Juvenal's and Boileau's satires on the same subject; and that on the Ruling Passion contains some fine sketches of character; those of Helluo and Narcissa are unrivalled.

The Night Thoughts of Dr. Young may be fairly classed among the moral didactic poems, and may be cited as an example to how high a degree of sublimity this description of poetry can attain. I have always regarded the opening as sweetly solemn and pathetic....

" Tir'd nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep,
" He, like the world, his ready visit pays
" Where fortune smiles; the wretched he forsakes,
" Swift on his downy pinions flies from woe,
" And lights on lids unsullied with a tear."

How exquisite should we account these lines had we never read those in Shakspeare's Henry IV., Part II. Act 3. Scene 1.

VI. SATIRE. Many of the poems, as I have already shewn, which go under this name, might be classed under didactic and moral poetry; yet there is a distinction, though the shades are so blended that it is difficult to draw a definite line. I think satire always implies an intermixture of wit and ridicule: for though

these qualities are not wholly excluded from didactic poetry, they are indispensable characteristics of satire.

Thus, though Horace preaches, and sublimely, in many of his satires and epistles, in others he is a mere satirist, and cuts with the keenest ridicule....

" Omne vafer vitium ridenti Flaccus amico
" Tangit; et admissus circum præcordia ludit,
" Callidus excusso populum suspendere naso."
Pers. Sat. I. l. 115.

" With concealed design,
" See crafty Horace his keen verses join;
" And with a sly insinuating grace,
" Laugh at his friend, and look him in the face;
" Could raise a blush where secret vice he found,
" And tickle while he gently prob'd the wound.
" With seeming innocence the crowd beguil'd,
" But made the desp'rate passes when he smil'd."
Dryden.

Juvenal is chiefly satirical, and seldom didactic; and even Young's Love of Fame, though of a grave complexion, is epigrammatic and satirical.

The origin of satire is very obscure. The word, however, seems to be derived from a kind of rustic comedy formerly exhibited in Greece. I presume....

" When Thespis first sung ballads in a cart."

" Carmine qui tragico vilem certavit ob hircum
" Mox etiam agrestos satiros nudavit: et asper
" Incolumi gravitate jocum tentavit; eo quod
" Ille cebris erat, et grata novitate, morandus
" Spectator." *De Arte Poet.* v. 220.

" The tragic bard, who for a worthless prize,
" Bid naked satyrs in his chorus rise,
" Though rude his mirth, yet labour'd to maintain
" The solemn grandeur of the tragic scene.
" For novelty alone he knew could charm
" A lawless crowd with wine and feasting warm."
Francis.

The thing could not be better described; and this, you must perceive, was essentially different from the satire of the Romans, which, as happens, in many other cases, transferred to itself a name to which it had no legitimate title. It is, I presume, on this account that Quinctillian lays claim altogether, on the part of his country, to the invention of satire. "Satira quidem tota nostra est;" (Inst. l. 1. c. 10.) and Horace, in his 10th Satire, attributes the invention to Ennius, and asserts that it was utterly unknown to the Greeks. The satire in dialogue, however, such as many of both Horace and Juvenal, seems rather to favour the Greek extraction, though in the hands of the Roman poets, it has, I dare believe, been infinitely improved.

Satires have been divided into two classes; the jocose and ludicrous, and the serious or declamatory. Indeed it must be obvious that the poem of Hudibras, or Swift's verses on his own death, are very different from the satires of Dr. Young. Among the Romans, Horace is cited as an instance of the one, and Juvenal of the other. But in truth satire may assume almost any form. It was composed both by Ennius and Lucilius in a kind of irregular verse, though Horace and Juvenal employ only the hexameter measure. We have seen satire in the form of the mock heroic, the epistle, the tale, the fable; and even in the lyric verse and form; as all must recollect who have read the arch productions of the facetious Peter Pindar.

Of English satires the first place must by all be assigned to the Hudibras of Butler, a poem which abounds equally in wit and learning, and possesses a greater portion of both than any human production. Butler must have had a memory that retained all he read, and an imagination that, from these unbounded stores, could produce an allusion whenever it was wanted. Perhaps there never was a long work supported with equal spirit; for though the polemical discussions between the knight and squire may appear tedious to us at a period so remote from the date of the poem, yet they are equally witty with the more lively parts which depict

the character and actions of the hero, and afford a most admirable picture of the absurd controversies of the times. What an admirable episode is that of Sidrophel, and where can a scene be found so witty and so comic as the dialogue between the knight and the lawyer? The outline of Hudibras is undoubtedly taken from Don Quixote, but it is a very bare outline, or rather a hint; for both the subject, and the manner of treating it, are essentially different.

Mr. Prior's Alma may be classed among the Hudibrastic satires; at least it has the same measure. Most of the satirical pieces of Swift are in what is called Hudibrastic verse, for this extraordinary poem has even given a name to one of our English measures, the eight syllable verse, with occasionally the double rhymes. Of Swift's satirical pieces in verse, the poem on his own death is by far the best. The Legion Club might more properly rank in the second class, as, though satirical, it is of a serious cast; but the mind of the incomparable writer was evidently on the decline when it was composed.

Boileau's Lutrin, Garth's Dispensary, Dryden's M'Flecnoe, and Mr. Pope's Dunciad, the hint of which is taken from the M'Flecnoe, but which is as much superior as every thing of Pope is to every thing of Dryden, may be classed among the serious satires. In all of these, however, there is something of a plot or story, in which they (as well as Hudibras) differ from the specimens we have of the Roman satire. Dr. Young's Love of Fame is also methodical, though methodical in a didactic sense. The satires of Horace, Juvenal and Perseus are more desultory, and miscellaneous, though Juvenal has in general more of method than Horace. I cannot give you better specimens of this description of satiric poetry than the following extracts from the 3d Satire of Juvenal, as imitated by Dr. Johnson....

"Tho' grief and fondness in my breast rebel,
"When injur'd Thales bids the town farewel,

" Yet still my calmer thoughts his choice commend,
" I praise the hermit, but regret the friend,
" Who now resolves, from vice and London far,
" To breathe in distant fields a purer air,
" And, fix'd on Cambria's solitary shore,
" Give to St. David one true Briton more.
" For who would leave, unbrib'd, Hibernia's land,
" Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?
" There none are swept by sudden fate away,
" But all, whom hunger spares, with age decay:
" Here malice, rapine, accident, conspire,
" And now a rabble rages, now a fire;
" Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay,
" And here the fell attorney prowls for prey;
" Here falling houses thunder on your head,
" And here a female atheist talks you dead.
" While Thales waits the wherry that contains
" Of dissipated wealth the small remains,
" On Thames's banks, in silent thought we stood,
" Where Greenwich smiles upon the silver flood:
" Struck with the seat that gave *Eliza birth,
" We kneel, and kiss the consecrated earth;
" In pleasing dreams the blissful age renew,
" And call Britannia's glories back to view;
" Behold her cross triumphant on the main,
" The guard of commerce, and the dread of Spain,
" Ere masquerades debauch'd, excise oppress'd,
" Or English honour grew a standing jest.
" A transient calm the happy scenes bestow,
" And for a moment lull the sense of woe.
" At length, awaking with contemptuous frown,
" Indignant Thales eyes the neighb'ring town."

" Let —— live here, for —— has learn'd to live.
" Here let those reign, whom pensions can incite
" To vote a patriot black, a courtier white;
" Explain their country's dear-bought rights away,
" And plead for pirates in the face of day;
" With slavish tenets taint our poison'd youth,
" And lend a lie the confidence of truth.
" Let such raise palaces, and manors buy,
" Collect a tax, or farm a lottery,
" With warbling eunuchs fill a licens'd stage,
" And lull to servitude a thoughtless age."

* Queen Elizabeth, born at Greenwich.

" But what, my friend, what hopes remain for me,
" Who start at theft, and blush at perjury?
" Who scarce forbear, tho' Britain's court he sing,
" To pluck a titled poet's borrow'd wing;
" A statesman's logic unconvinc'd can hear,
" And dare to slumber o'er the Gazetteer;
" Despise a fool in half his pension drest,
" And strive in vain to laugh at H——y's jest.
" Others with softer smiles, and subtler art,
" Can sap the principles, or taint the heart;
" With more address a lover's note convey,
" Or bribe a virgin's innocence away.
" Well may they rise, while I, whose rustic tongue
" Ne'er knew to puzzle right, or varnish wrong,
" Spurn'd as a beggar, dreaded as a spy,
" Live unregarded, unlamented die."

" The cheated nation's happy fav'rites see!
" Mark whom the great caress, who frown on me!
" London! the needy villain's general home,
" The common-sewer of Paris and of Rome;
" With eager thirst, by folly or by fate,
" Sucks in the dregs of each corrupted state.
" Forgive my transports on a theme like this,
" I cannot bear a French metropolis."

" By numbers here from shame or censure free,
" All crimes are safe, but hated poverty.
" This, only this, the rigid law pursues,
" This, only this, provokes the snarling muse.
" The sober trader at a tatter'd cloak,
" Wakes from his dream, and labours for a joke;
" With brisker air the silken courtiers gaze,
" And turn the varied taunt a thousand ways.
" Of all the griefs that harass the distress'd,
" Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest:
" Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart,
" Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart.
" Has heav'n reserv'd, in pity to the poor,
" No pathless waste, or undiscover'd shore?
" No secret island on the boundless main?
" No peaceful desart yet unclaim'd by Spain?
" Quick let us rise, the happy seats explore,
" And bear oppression's insolence no more."

" Prepare for death, if here at night you roam,
" And sign your will before you sup from home.

" Some fiery fop, with new commission vain,
" Who sleeps on brambles till he kills his man;
" Some frolic drunkard, reeling from a feast,
" Provokes a broil, and stabs you for a jest.
" Yet ev'n these heroes, mischievously gay,
" Lords of the street, and terrors of the way;
" Flush'd as they are with folly, youth, and wine,
" Their prudent insults to the poor confine;
" Afar they mark the flambeau's bright approach,
" And shun the shining train, and golden coach."

" A single jail, in Alfred's golden reign,
" Could half the nation's criminals contain;
" Fair justice then, without constraint ador'd,
" Held high the steady scale, but deep'd the sword;
" No spies were paid, no special juries known,
" Blest age! but ah! how diff'rent from our own!
" Much could I add——but see the boat at hand,
" The tide retiring calls me from the land:
" Farewel;—When youth, and health, and fortune spent,
" Thou fly'st for refuge to the wilds of Kent;
" And tir'd, like me, with follies and with crimes,
" In angry numbers warn'st succeeding times;
" Then shall thy friend, nor thou refuse his aid,
" Still foe to vice, forsake his Cambrian shade;
" In virtue's cause once more exert his rage
" Thy satire point, and animate thy page."

Of this kind of satire the most perfect specimens in our language are Mr. Pope's prologue and epilogue to his satires. The first, the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, is evidently, as Dr. Johnson observes, made up of scraps, (but they are choice ones) connected together as loosely as many of Horace's. To particularize the excellent touches of satire which this poem contains, would be almost to transcribe the whole. Dr. Johnson remarks, that the weakest part is the lines on Sporus. The epilogue, which consists of two dialogues, is more regular, but has hardly equal spirit. Both are, however, in the true style of Horace.

VII. Descriptive poetry embraces a very ample scope. Description, indeed, enters into all poetry, whether heroic, didactic, or pastoral, and, under proper restraints, is the soul of all poetry whatever; but there

are some forms with which it particularly consorts, such as elegy and lyric. I am, however, at present to treat of poems professedly descriptive, which definition excludes all those that can be arranged under any of the other classes.

Descriptive poetry may be classed under two divisions....That which offers to our view a delineation of nature, or of natural scenery; and that which describes the manners, sentiments, and characters of men. That the first kind has little in itself engaging is evident, since all descriptive poets are obliged to bring sentiment to their aid to enliven what would otherwise infallibly tire; and since it is a rule universally established among critics, that descriptions should be short. Man is a creature that is always looking to himself, and when a writer wanders far from this favourite theme, he will be little read. Of particular scenes I aver it is impossible in words to draw a picture by which they can be known. Yet general description, in the hands of a master, has its charms, particularly when combined with what interests the human heart.

The ancients seem to have had no poems which could be exclusively termed descriptive. Those of Moschus, Bion, and the other minor poets of Greece, which might be forced into this class, are called Idylliums, and have generally some other subject for a ground-work. The moderns have excelled in this department. For though it is extremely difficult to make a merely descriptive poem interesting, the difficulty of the achievement is a high commendation to the poet who succeeds. Of those poems which describe natural scenery, Denham's Cooper's Hill, Pope's Windsor Forest, and Roscoe's Mount Pleasant, are the best. I add the latter, though it is not so much known as it deserves; but the name of the author has been justly celebrated since its publication, and it is, in my opinion, inferior to neither of the others. Cooper's Hill Dr. Johnson regards as an original work, and calls Denham "the father of a species of composition that may be denominated *local poetry*." Yet the very limited popularity of

this poem at present is an argument against this species of poetry; and I believe Pope's "Windsor Forest" (notwithstanding his magic wand, which turned almost every thing to gold, and the *curiosa felicitas*, in which he was not exceeded by Horace) is less read than any of his poems, the "Temple of Fame" excepted, which may also be regarded in some measure as a descriptive poem.

Mr. Roscoe's "Mount Pleasant" was written at a very early age, and ought not therefore to be subjected to all the severities of criticism. As it is less known than the others, I shall select a few specimens from it, which I think will not have a tendency to lessen the author's well-earned reputation. If I might add a tribute of early friendship to this truly amiable man, I would do it in the words of Perseus....

"Tecum etenim longos memini consumere soles,
"Et tecum primas epulis decerpere noctes," &c.

"Long summer days thy precepts I rehearse;
"And winter nights were short in thy converse."
Dryden.

The introduction is beautiful, but I have not room for all the beauties of this poem. I shall therefore at present only claim your attention to the author's account of the rise of commerce in the local prospect that lay before him....

"Far as the eye can trace the prospect round,
"The splendid tracks of opulence are found:
"Yet scarce an hundred annual rounds have run,
"Since first the fabric of this power begun;
"His noble waves inglorious, Mersey roll'd,
"Nor felt those waves by labouring art controul'd;
"Along his side a few small cots were spread,
"His finny brood their humble tenants fed;
"At opening dawn with fraudful nets supply'd,
"The paddling skiff would brave his spacious tide,
"Ply round the shores, nor tempt the dangerous main,
"But seek ere night the friendly port again.

" Now o'er the wondering world her name resounds,
" From northern climes, to India's distant bounds.
" ....Where-e'er his shores the broad Atlantic laves;
" Where-e'er the Baltic rolls his wintry waves;
" Where-e'er the honour'd flood extends his tide,
" That clasps Sicilia like a favour'd bride;
" Whose waves in ages past so oft have bore
" The storm of battle on the Punic shore;
" Have wash'd the banks of Greece's learned bow'rs,
" And view'd at distance Rome's imperial tow'rs;
" In every clime her prosperous fleets are known,
" She makes the wealth of every clime her own."

The history of commerce is connected with the preceding subject.

" When commerce, yet an infant, rais'd her head,
" 'Twas mutual want her growing empire spread:
" Those mutual wants a distant realm supply'd,
" And like advantage every clime enjoy'd.
" Distrustless then of every treacherous view,
" An open welcome met the stranger crew;
" And whilst the whitening fleet approach'd to land,
" The wondering natives hail'd them from the strand;
" Fearless to meet, amidst the flow of soul,
" The lurking dagger, or the poison'd bowl.
" Now, more destructive than a blighting storm,
" A bloated monster, Commerce, rears her form;
" Throws the meek olive from her daring hand,
" Grasps the red sword, and whirls the flaming brand:
" True to no faith; by no restraints controul'd;
" By guilt made cautious, and by avarice bold.
" Each feature reddens with the tinge of shame,
" Whilst Patna's plain, and Buxar's fields I name."

A more pleasing subject, the charitable institutions of Liverpool and its vicinity, is perhaps still more pleasingly illustrated....

" Sweep the light strings, and louder swell the lyre!
" Far nobler themes a nobler song require.....
" The heav'n born virtues come,....a lovely train;
" They prompt the verse,....be theirs the votive strain.
" ....Not those that seek in lonely shades to dwell,
" The selfish inmates of the hermit's cell;

" Like his pale lamp, a partial light supply,
" Unblest to live, and unregarded die;
" But those design'd to sooth the labouring breast,
" Protect the weak, and give the weary rest;
" Assuage the rigors of corporeal pain;
" Supply the poor, and loose the prisoners' chain:
" And like the radiance of the solar ray,
" On all around to pour impartial day,
" ....Known by the wat'ry lustre of her eye,
" Her sorrowing smile, and sympathizing sigh;
" See! tender Pity comes;....at her controul,
" Drops the big tear, and melts the stubborn soul;
" So the rude rock by power divine impell'd,
" Gush'd forth in streams, and cheer'd the thirsty field.
" ....Next Charity,....by no proud pageants known,
" Nor crown, nor sweeping train, nor azure zone.
" ....If chance remembrance wakes the generous deed,
" No pride elates her, and she claims no meed;
" And timorous ever of the vulgar gaze,
" She loves the action, but disclaims the praise.
" ....Yet not of Virtue's open cause afraid,
" Where public blessings ask her public aid,
" She shines superior to the wretch's sneer,
" And bold in conscious honour, knows no fear.
" Hence rose yon pile, where sickness finds relief,
" Where lenient care allays the weight of grief;*
" ....Yon spacious roof, where hush'd in calm repose,
" The drooping widow half forgets her woes:†
" ....Yon calm retreat, where screen'd from every ill,
" The helpless orphan's throbbing heart lies still;‡
" And finds delighted, in the peaceful dome,
" A better parent, and a happier home."

There are, besides, Dyer's Grongar Hill, Jago's Edge Hill, Mr. M'Neil's Carse of Stirling, and many other poems of this kind in our language, of considerable merit.

Perhaps the fleece of Dyer, Phillip's Cyder, and Somerville's Chace, may come under this description. They are now little read; but for minuter observations on Den-

* The public Infirmary.
† The Alms-houses adjoining the Infirmary.
‡ The Blue-coat Hospital.

ham, Phillips and Dyer, I must refer you to the first of critics, Dr. Johnson.

Thomson's Seasons may be considered as of a mixed character, since they contain at least as much sentiment as description; but that remark will perhaps apply to most of those I have mentioned. After Dr. Johnson's admirable criticism on the Seasons, I feel incapable of saying a single word. That critic remarks that "His mode of thinking and of expressing his thoughts is original: his blank verse is no more the verse of Milton, or of any other poet than the rhymes of Prior are the rhymes of Cowley." "The reader (he adds) of the Seasons wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shews him, and that he never yet has felt what Thomson impresses." The same author judiciouly observes that "the great defect of the Seasons is the want of method;" and that "his diction is sometimes too exuberant, and may sometimes be charged with filling the ear more than the mind."

From such poems as these the gradation is easy to those which are chiefly descriptive of sentiment. In this line there is scarcely any thing that can bear competition with the "Traveller" and "Deserted Village" of Dr. Goldsmith. With these you are well acquainted, and I have already sufficiently indulged in quotations from them. "The Deserted Village" is a more interesting and finished poem than the "Traveller." There is little of method in either; but probably by an attention to method they would have been spoiled.

There are many other excellent poems which may be classed under the sentimental descriptive, among which I shall only mention Mr. Rogers' Pleasures of Memory, and Mr. Campbell's Pleasures of Hope. There are some excellent short pieces of this kind also in my friend Mr. M'Neil's collection of Poems.

As I have already indulged in paying one tribute to early friendship, let me present you with a short extract from a poem which, excellent as it is, still is not more estimable than its author....

" The beauteous maid that bids the world adieu,
" Oft of that world will snatch a fond review;
" Oft at the shrine neglect her beads, to trace
" Some social scene, some dear familiar face;
" Forgot, when first a father's stern controul
" Chas'd the gay visions of her opening soul:
" And ere, with iron tongue, the vesper bell
" Bursts thro' the cypress-walk, the convent-cell,
" Oft will her warm and wayward heart revive,
" To love and joy still tremblingly alive?
" The whisper'd vow, the chaste caress prolong,
" Weave the light dance, and swell the choral song;
" With wrapt ear drink th' enchanting serenade;
" And, as it melts along the moonlight glade,
" To each soft note return as soft a sigh,
" And bless the youth that bids her slumbers fly."

LETTER XXVIII.

ELEGY.....LYRIC POETRY....EPISTLES....TALES AND FABLES....OVID....TIBULLUS...PROPERTIUS....POPE...COLLINS....GRAY....PINDAR....HORACE...MILTON...DRYDEN ....ANACREON....COWLEY....SONGS AND BALLADS.

MY DEAR JOHN,

ELEGY, as a poetical composition, rises still higher in the scale than didactic, and even than descriptive poetry. It indeed approaches to the lyric, which is, if I may so express myself, the most poetical of all poetry. The language of elegy ought to be nearly as much abstracted from that of common life as the language of the ode, whereas both didactic and descriptive poetry often condescend to familiar topics, and those expressed in language very little above that of polished prose or conversation. Elegy also admits of nearly as much figure as lyric poetry itself. Indeed figurative language, and fine and interesting allusions, though with less boldness than lyric poetry admits of, are the soul, and almost the characteristic of elegy.

I can have no doubt in deriving the word elegy from the Greek Ελεος (pity), and in confirmation of this we find that it has been appropriated, by the poets of all ages, to pathetic subjects. It was first employed in lamentation for the decease of great persons, or those who were particularly dear to the writer; it was afterwards extended to express the misery of disappointed love, and has sometimes been made the vehicle of moral sentiment.

From these circumstances every thing in thought or diction which consists with what is solemn or pathetic, is admissible in elegy; but conceit, witticism, or point, is wholly inconsistent with it. It should be soft, tender, and plaintive; to these characteristics the Latin verse

of hexameter and pentameter, and our alternate verse of ten syllables are admirably adapted. The former was by the Latins emphatically called elegiac verse, and from its sweetness, was adopted in many compositions not strictly elegiac, such as Ovid's epistles; while, on the contrary, we have many real elegies which are not in that measure which we call elegiac.

The origin of elegy is undoubtedly remote. Bishop Lowth, in his Lectures on Sacred Poetry, asserts that it was a common form of composition among the Hebrews, and instances the pathetic lamentation on the death of Saul, and many of the Psalms which were written during the Babylonish captivity, particularly the 42d. You will find in my translation of the Lectures an humble attempt to translate both the Lamentation for Saul, and the Psalms in question, into English elegiac measure. Callimachus and Philetas, among the Greeks, are celebrated as elegiac writers. Horace professes himself to be in doubt with respect to the inventor of elegiac poetry....

" Quis tamen exiguos elegos emiserit auctor,
" Grammatici certant; et adhuc sub judice lis est."
De Art. Poet. v. 77.

" By whom invented critics still contend,
" And of their vain disputings find no end." *Francis.*

Among the Latins, however, we find no elegiac writers of any note before Ovid, Tibullus, and Propertius, who were all contemporaries, and are the best writers extant in this peculiar line. The Tristia of Ovid, I think, affords the happiest specimens of elegiac poetry.

Our English writers of elegy have not confined themselves, like the Latins, to a particular measure, though latterly the term elegiac has been appropriated to the stanza of ten syllable verse, with alternate rhymes. Thus Mr. Pope's Elegy on the death of an unfortunate young Lady, is truly such, though it is in the heroic measure. Though Dr. Johnson admits that it "is written in some parts with vigorous animation, and in others

with gentle tenderness," yet I will confess to you, that neither the feelings nor the expression of the poet ever seemed to me adequate to the occasion. Perhaps it was written at that season when the powers of the understanding and imagination were torpified by sorrow, I might say by horror; perhaps it was not possible, so intimately concerned as he was (the remote cause of the death she voluntarily incurred) to express his feelings; perhaps the obscurity in which from delicacy he was compelled to veil the story, reduced him to the necessity of employing general terms, and avoiding that minuteness of delineation which is the life of poetry. The theme, however, appears not to have deserted his thoughts, and it is not unfair to presume that the similitude of the case might direct his attention to the composition of that first of poems, the Eloisa. There, upon a subject sufficiently remote, yet sufficiently resembling, he pours forth his genuine feelings, and the concluding lines incontestibly allude to the transaction in question.

There is a poem of Collins on the Death of Thomson, which, though not exactly in the measure which we have appropriated to this description of poem, bears all the true characteristics of elegy....softness, sweetness, melancholy, and harmony. I have always admired beyond any thing of the kind the following stanzas....

" Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore,
" When Thames in summer wreaths is drest;
" And oft suspend the dashing oar,
" To bid thy gentle spirit rest."

" And oft as ease and health retire
" To breezy lawn, or forest deep,
" The friend shall view yon whitening spire,
" And mid the varied landscape weep.

" Yet lives there one, whose heedless eye
" Shall scorn thy pale shrine glimm'ring near!
" With him, sweet Bard, may Fancy die,
" And joy desert the blooming year."

Mr. Gray's Elegy in a Country Church Yard has deserved all the praises that have been bestowed upon it. Here the muse of elegy has

" Stoop'd to truth, and moraliz'd her song."

" It abounds (says Dr. Johnson) with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo." The best stanzas I think are....

" Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
" The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear ;
" Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
" And waste its sweetness on the desart air."

" For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey
" This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
" Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
" Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind."

The former of these Mr. Gray has himself imitated, and I think improved in his Installation Ode....

" Thy lib'ral heart, thy judging eye,
" The flower unheeded shall descry,
" And bid it round Heaven's altars shed
" The fragrance of its blushing head :
" Shall raise from earth the latent gem
" To glitter on the diadem."

Serene in the first line (notwithstanding the apology of my late friend G. Wakefield), if not quite an expletive, will generally be mistaken for one.

IX. LYRIC poetry may, in point of antiquity, contend with any other species, perhaps with the epic itself. Though we have no knowledge of the metre of the Hebrews, we cannot doubt but they had poetry, and as little (while the sublime book of Psalms is before us) can we doubt that much of that poetry is lyric. Many, if not most of them, we know to a certainty were sung or

set to music, which both the term ode, and the epithet lyric (from the lyre, a musical instrument) imply. If we advert to the remote origin of the ode, it will perhaps account at once for the sublimity which is required from the lyric bard, and the irregularity in which he is indulged. All the ideas of men just emerging from the savage state are wild, awful, enthusiastic, and passionate; and they express themselves concisely, and with abruptness. Such were probably the first models of the ode, from whatever quarter they were derived, and upon these models poets afterwards composed.

There is, however, an evident distinction to be made in lyric compositions. There is the serious and sublime ode; and the familiar and comic, or, in modern language, the song. The first may be regarded as the original ode: it was employed both by the Hebrews and the Pagan nations at solemn festivals in their religious ceremonies; and by the latter in praise of heroes and other distinguished personages. There is no description of poetry that requires both thoughts and language more sublime and more remote from common usage than this. A fine ode is compared by Horace to a majestic torrent from a mountain's top, which overflows its wonted limits....

" Monte decurrens velut amnis, imbres
" Quem super notas aluere ripas
" Fervet, immensusque ruit profundo
" Pindarus ore."——B. iv. O. 2.

" As when a river swollen by sudden showers
" O'er its known banks from some steep mountain pours,
" So in profound, unmeasurable song
" The deep-mouth'd Pindar, foaming pours along."
Francis.

Yet with all this seeming irregularity, there is no composition that requires a more artful and judicious arrangement than a perfect ode. It may truly be said of it that the perfection of art is to conceal the art; and I will venture to say more, that to form a good ode, the poet should have the whole plan regularly digested in

his mind before he begins to compose. The shorter the poem, the more nice should be the arrangement. It is not necessary that an ode, like an epigram, should conclude in a point; but it is absolutely necessary that it should rise in a kind of climax, and that the strongest part should be towards the conclusion.

For the Hebrew ode, with some of the most perfect specimens which a man of fine taste could select, I must refer to Bishop Lowth's Lectures on Sacred Poetry. In Greek, Pindar has long occupied the highest situation in this department; and from his exceeding popularity among his countrymen and contemporaries, the nicest and most fastidious of critics; from the applause of the best judges in succeeding generations, Horace, Quinctilian, Longinus, &c.; we must not dare to dispute that sentence which has invested him with the first honours as a lyric poet. To us, at this very distant period, the odes of Pindar seem to contain some beautiful poetical expressions; occasionally some fine, but common-place, moral sentiments; but the personages whom he celebrates, and the transactions to which he alludes, are gone so far down the stream of oblivion, that the modern reader must feel a want of interest in them. Even the harmony of his numbers, so celebrated by his contemporaries, are impaired by the lapse of time; and I must confess that some of the short odes in the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides (the best part indeed of these poems) have for me superior charms. The subjects for this kind of ode, as well as those of the opposite description, are the odes of Anacreon defined by Horace....

" Musa dedit fidibus Divos, puerosque Deorum,
" Et pugilem victorem, et equum certamine primum,
" Et juvenum curas, et libera vina referre."
De Art. Poet. v. 33.

" The muse to nobler subjects tunes her lyre;
" Gods, and the sons of gods, her song inspire,
" Wrestler and steed, who gain'd the Olympic prize;
" Love's pleasing cares, and wine's unbounded joys."
Francis.

The Roman lyrist has attempted with success both descriptions of the ode; but if I feel rightly with respect to an author whom I have from infancy admired almost above every other, Horace excels in a kind of middle style, the polite, the tender, the pleasant, and the moral. The two odes (Lib. III. O. 9. and Lib. IV. O. 3.), of which Scaliger professes that he would rather have been the author than of most of Pindar's, and rather indeed than to have been king of Arragon, are of this description. The incomparable poem (Lib. III. O. 3.) "Justum et Tenacem," &c. is not of the highest description of lyric poetry. It is elegant and moral, and the beginning almost sublime. In a word, Horace as a lyric writer is original; he is neither Anacreon nor Pindar; his manner is quite his own.

In our own language we have some lyric productions of the highest excellence; among the first of which I must rank the Allegro and Penseroso of Milton, though by Dr. Blair, and other critics, they have been most improperly classed among descriptive poems; but they have, in truth, every characteristic of lyric. Like Horace, Milton is indeed original, and imitates neither Pindar nor any other poet. He happily combines sentiment and description. In his Comus too, there are some happy specimens of lyric poetry, as well as in Sampson Agonistes, each suited to the nature of the drama in which they are found, and perfectly on the Greek model.

Of the two rival odes, Dryden's and Pope's, on St. Cæcilia's day, so much has been written, and some observations so well-written, by our great critic Dr. Johnson, that I may be well excused for declining to enter into the detail, and for referring you at once to his life of Pope. Dryden's is more happily planned, Pope's more carefully executed. Dryden's is a fine and interesting story, well told on the whole, at least well arranged; Pope's is an assemblage of ancient mythology, and of modern observations on the power of music. It has always struck me that there is a good deal of what Mr. Pope called *namby-pamby* in both....

" With ravish'd ears
" The monarch hears,
" Assumes the god,
" Affects to nod,
" And seems to shake the spheres."

" Rich the treasure,
" Sweet the pleasure,
" Sweet is pleasure after pain," &c....*Dryden.*

" Dreadful gleams,
" Dismal screams,
" Fires that glow,
" Shrieks of woe,
" Sullen moans,
" Hollow groans," &c....*Pope.*

These lines involuntarily remind me of some of the burlesque poems addressed to Gulliver; and are greatly below the dignity of a serious ode. The concluding thought in each of these poems is very nearly alike, and in each is too epigrammatical, another capital blemish in a lyric composition.

In truth, though we have no modern specimens of lyric poetry which equal the Allegro and Penseroso of Milton, we have many that far surpass the efforts of Dryden and Pope. Mr. Gray's Bard, the Progress of Poetry, his Ode on Eton College, the rich yet simple effusion to Spring, may be classed among the highest efforts of the lyric muse. The two first Dr. Johnson has criticised with unwarranted asperity; for after all he has given us little more than verbal criticisms: they are however deserving of your attention. Where even they are not just, they are still ingenious.

The bard is superior to the other in the plan and arrangement. Attention is caught by the solemn though abrupt opening of the scene, and is still preserved by the interesting nature of the historical prophecy. Notwithstanding Dr. Johnson's arch remark, I have always greatly admired the passage beginning....

" Ye tow'rs of Julius," &c.

In the "Progress of Poetry," Shakspeare and Milton are finely characterised. I wonder, however, the fastidious critic did not see something like conceit in these two lines....

> "He saw....but blasted with excess of light,
> "Clos'd his eyes in endless night."

The lyric poetry of Collins is less stately, solemn and sublime, than that of Gray, but it is more easy, natural, sweet, and interesting. Of the fine image in the first stanza of the Ode to Mercy I have already spoken. This, and the Ode to Fear, that on the Poetical Character, and "The Manners," an ode, have always appeared to me the most original and interesting, though none of them can be perused by any reader of taste without real pleasure.

We have many other beatiful modern productions of this kind. Some of the Odes in Mr. Mason's Caractacus and Elfrida, are very fine, particularly that in the former "to Death." I may particularly add Mr. Wharton's Ode to Fancy, Dr. Akenside's on Lyric Poetry, and the Ode to Superstition, by a living author, already mentioned in a former letter with I hope becoming respect.

The second description of lyric poems includes those on love, conviviality, and all the lighter subjects. The two fragments which we have of Sappho, though love is the subject, are yet in a style as polished and sublime as any production whatever of the lyric muse. Those of Anacreon (though I cannot praise their morality) are fascinating beyond expression, both for the vivacity of the thoughts, and the unrivalled harmony of his verse. Among the most beautiful of his productions I may specify the 3d, the 28th, and the 46th. The Dove and the Swallow are also charming. Cowley is among the best of his translators; and, as Cowley is not in every body's hands, I will transcribe a short but spirited ode, embellished, or defaced as you may please to call it, by the luxuriant genius of Cowley....

THE GRASHOPPER.

" Happy insect, what can be
" In happiness compar'd to thee?
" Fed with nourishment divine,
" The dewy morning's gentle wine!
" Nature waits upon thee still,
" And thy verdant cup does fill.
" 'Tis fill'd wherever thou dost tread,
" Nature self's thy Ganimed.
" Though dost drink, and dance, and sing;
" Happier than the happiest king!
" All the fields which thou dost see,
" All the plants belong to thee,
" All that summer hours produce,
" Fertile made with early juice.
" Man for thee does sow and plough;
" Farmer he, and landlord thou!
" Thou dost innocently joy;
" Nor does thy luxury destroy;
" The shepherd gladly heareth thee,
" More harmonious than he.
" Thee country hinds with gladness hear,
" Prophet of the ripen'd year!
" Thee Phœbus loves, and does inspire;
" Phœbus is himself thy sire.
" To thee, of all things upon earth,
" Life is no longer than thy mirth.
" Happy insect, happy thou,
" Dost neither age nor winter know.
" But when thou'st drunk, and danc'd and sung
" Thy fill, the flow'ry leaves among,
" (Voluptuous, and wise with all,
" Epicurean animal!)
" Sated with thy summer feast,
" Thou retir'st to endless rest

In this ode

Ολιγην δροσον πεπωκως,

is beautifully translated....

" Fed with nourishment divine,
" The dewy morning's gentle wine."

Θέμος γλυκυς προφήτης

is almost literally, but excellently given....

"Prophet of the ripened year."

"Farmer he, and landlord thou."

is in the peculiarly playful style of Cowley.

Horace has also many odes of the gay and sprightly kind, of great beauty and excellence; but in no language whatever are so many to be found as in our own. With us they have been distinguished from the first by the name of SONGS, as most of them have been set and *sung* to music. Dr. Aikin, in an excellent collection which he has made, and which is preceded by a judicious essay on song writing, has classed them under the following heads: 1st. Ballads and pastoral songs; 2d. Passionate and descriptive songs; 3d. Ingenious and witty songs. To this arrangement I do no mean to object; yet it appears to me that another class might be added ....Patriotic and war songs; such as the celebrated Greek odes of Alcæus and Tyrtæus, which inspired their heroic countrymen with the spirit of liberty and the ardour of patriotism.

The English ballad will scarcely rank under the description of lyric poetry; and I place it here rather because I know not where else to assign it a station, than from any sense of the propriety of the collocation. An elegant poetess of the present time, who was so kind as to write the article Poetry for my Dictionary, has furnished us with the real origin of our ballad. "In the age of Charlemagne, the minstrels of Provence, or, as they were called, the troubadours, introduced the metrical tales or ballads, which, from the dialect in which they were written, were called also romances. Their poems were all written in rhyme; but whether this practice was borrowed from the Goths or Arabs is uncertain." But though the first ballads might have

for their subjects tales, or simple narratives, such as Chevy Chace, the Children in the Wood, &c., yet we find the term was soon extended to various subjects of love or morals. The ballad of "Death and the Lady," which yet occupies a place in the chimney of many a farm-house, is a moral dialogue. Dr. Aikin has therefore, with propriety, classed among the ballads the popular songs of Mr. Gay, which are real lyrics, and of which Black-eyed Susan is perhaps the best. The little songs in our comic operas have as much a claim to the title of lyric as the choruses in the Greek tragedies, and indeed are more naturally introduced, for singing corresponds better with a representation of joy than of sorrow.

Of "Passionate and descriptive songs," the number is very great in our language, as you will see in Dr. Aikin's collection, and yet this does not include the whole. Amidst such an assemblage of beauties, it is difficult to select; and if I followed the dictates of my own taste, the mere catalogue would fill a page. I will however mention Thomson's "For ever Fortune," Littleton's "Heavy Hours," Percy's "O Nancy," and the well-known ballad of "Old Darby and Joan," as extremely beautiful.

Our witty songs form a class not less numerous than the preceding. The following is exquisitely witty....

"The women all tell me I'm false to my lass,
"That I quit my dear Chloé, and stick to my glass:
"But to you men of reason, my reasons I'll own;
"And if you don't like them, why, let them alone.

"Altho' I have left her, the truth I'll declare,
"I believe she was good, and I'm sure she is fair,
"But goodness and charms in a bumper I see,
"That make it as good and as charming as she.

"My Chloe had dimples and smiles I must own,
"But tho' she could smile, yet in truth she could frown.
"Now tell me, ye lovers of liquor divine,
"Did you e'er see a frown in a bumper of wine?

" Her lilies and roses were just in her prime,
" Yet lilies and roses are conquer'd by time;
" But in wine from its age such a benefit flows,
" That we like it the better the older it grows.

" They tell me my love would in time have been cloy'd,
" And that beauty's insipid when once 'tis enjoy'd;
" But in wine I both time and enjoyment defy,
" For the longer I drink, the more thirsty am I.

" Let murders, and battles, and history prove
" The mischiefs that wait upon rivals in love:
" But in drinking, thank heaven, no rival contends,
" For the more we love liquor, the more we are friends.

" She too might have poison'd the joy of my life,
" With nurses, and babies, and squalling and strife,
" But my wine neither nurses nor babies can bring,
" And a big-belly'd bottle's a mighty good thing.

" We shorten our days when with love we engage;
" It brings on diseases, and hastens old age:
" But wine from grim death can its votaries save,
" And keep t'other leg out when there's one in the grave.

" Perhaps, like her sex, ever false to their word,
" She had left me....to get an estate or a lord:
" But my bumper, regarding nor title nor pelf,
" Will stand by me when I can't stand myself.

" Then let my dear Chloe no longer complain;
" She's rid of her lover, and I of my pain;
" For in wine, mighty wine, many comforts I spy:
" Should you doubt what I say,....take a bumper and try."

" When Orpheus went down to the regions below" is also full of wit, but it is almost a translation from Quevedo. " Celia altogether," by Whitehead, is sprightly and pleasing. " Love and folly" is either a pretty song or a pretty epigram. It may be proper to notice here that though all epigrammatic points are judiciously proscribed in the serious lyric, they are yet very admissible in the lighter kinds. Lord Chesterfields little song beginning " Mistaken fair," &c. has much wit; and there is a vein of odd humour in a song

not very new....." Vain are the charms of white and red," &c. Of modern song-writers George Alexander Stephens, Mr. Sheridan, and Captain Morris have excelled most of their contemporaries in the facetious and witty.

As in prose, so the epistolary form will apply to any subject, and almost to any style of poetical composition. It suits best, however, with the moral, the familiar and the gay. Mr. Prior's Epistle to Fleetwood Shepherd is a happy specimen of the familiar epistle in verse. Mr. Pope's Epistle to Mr. Addison, occasioned by his Dialogues on Medals, is excellent in its kind; and Mr. Addison's Letter from Italy contains some fine description, and some good poetry, though the style of his heroic verse is never equal to that of Mr. Pope.

Tales and fables may also be adopted into almost any species of poetry. An heroic poem is indeed only an extended tale; and Dryden's Alexander's Feast is a kind of story. Tales and fables are often happily introduced as illustrations in moral poetry. There are some very lively and interesting in the satires and epistles of Horace; and I have already remarked the excellence of Pope's Sir Balaam.

For nature, interest, and useful tendency, the best tale in our language is that of my friend Mr. M'Neil, " Scotland's Scaith." Of a different description, but extremely beautiful, is Parnel's Hermit. Dr. Goldsmith's beautiful tale of " Edwin and Angelina" has seemingly furnished the hint for the story of Dr. Percy's " Friar of Orders Gray," in which the author has ingeniously contrived to weave several detached fragments of ancient composition. Both are beautiful, but they want the moral of the two former pieces.

Phædrus was the first who composed fables in verse; but he is little more than a mere translator of Æsop, and has lost much of the simplicity and beauty of the original. The best poetical fables in any language are those of Mr. Gay.

LETTER XXIX.

DRAMATIC POETRY....TRAGEDY....ÆSCHYLUS....SOPHOCLES.....EURIPIDES.....CORNEILLE.....RACINE.....VOLTAIRE....SHAKSPEARE....OTWAY....DRYDEN....ROWE....YOUNG.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I SHALL proceed in this letter to a very brief consideration of dramatic poetry, a branch of literature of which your favourites the ancients had very faint ideas indeed; and whoever draws his opinions from them, will never conceive properly of what we denominate, in plain English, (I cannot find a better word) a *play*. A play has this advantage above every other work of imagination, that it is a perfect representation of life: not only the ear and the understanding are interested, but the eye itself: it sees the whole action, and if the representation is a good one, the deception is almost complete, and we might mistake it for a reality.

" Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures,
" Quam quæ sunt oculis commissa fidelibus et quæ
" Ipse sibi tradit spectator." *De Art Poet.* v. 180.

" What we hear
" With weaker passion will affect the heart,
" Than when the faithful eye beholds the part."
Francis.

The word *drama* is universally allowed to be derived from the Greek verb δραω, to do, and it might be literally explained an *action*. Our word *play* perhaps is still better, as it implies an *amusing* representation or entertainment; yet it is perhaps more applicable to representations of the gay or sportive kind than to those of tragedy.

Both terms, however, imply an action, or story, or plot as it is sometimes called, and this constitutes the difference between plays and dialogues. Some of the pastorals of Theocritus and Virgil might be termed little dramas, because they have something of plot or story; but the majority of eclogues are mere dialogues.

According to the nature of the subject, dramatic pieces class under two divisions, tragedy or comedy; though many modern performances will not strictly fall under either of these characters; and the mixture of both (the tragi-comedy) has been practised by some of our first writers, Shakspeare, Otway, Dryden, and Southern; and is defended by some of our first critics, I think by Dr. Johnson, as a more perfect representation of real life.

The same rules in general apply to comedy as to tragedy. Aristotle has advanced precepts for their composition, all deduced from the practice of the Greek writers, and which have been most absurdly adopted by the French critics, and dramatic writers. But before we inquire into the reasonableness of these dictates of Aristotle, it will be proper to take a cursory view of the origin and progress of the Greek drama.

There is scarcely any circumstance in which the gradual progress of human invention is more exemplified, than in the origin and improvement of dramatic composition among the Greeks.

The Greek drama was originally nothing more than a rude song, exhibited by one or more clownish minstrels or ballad-singers, who disfigured themselves to excite attention. Thespis, who lived 564 years before Christ, collected a company of them together, and transported them from village to village in a kind of waggon; and something like this state of the drama we see in the rude exhibitions of mummers, and morrice-dancers, in the inland parts of this kingdom. Thespis added to the singers an interlocutor, who served to explain the matter of the songs; and in this state the drama continued, till an accident brought it to greater perfection. In the representation of a tragedy, in which

the furies were exhibited, the barbarous dresses of the chorus (which consisted of fifty persons) frighted the pregnant women into fits. Hence Æschylus was induced to retrench the number of the chorus, and to compensate for the deficiency, added to the actors or interlocutors. He erected a stage, and ornamented it with machinery; and equipped the actors with the robe, the buskin, and the mask.* The two latter of which were accommodations to the large theatres; and if our managers proceed as they have lately done in enlarging our play-houses, our actors must be mounted in buskins, disfigured in masks, and must vociferate through speaking trumpets.

From this statement you will see how very imperfect the Greek drama was, and how very absurd those critics are who would confine us to a servile imitation of it. You will also see the reason of what are called the unities. The Greeks had but one scene, and as the actual performance was an ode, the chorus (or company of singers), which was originally the main object, never left the stage. The representation therefore admitted of no change of place, and only of the time which was employed in the recitation. For the unity of action more is to be said; since in every composition of hu-

* "The drama owes its rise to days of festivity. For in ancient times it was usual for men, when they had collected in the fruits of the earth, to meet together, that they might sacrifice to the deity, and unbend their minds from the fatigues of the harvest. Hence arose two sorts of poetry; the one graver, in praise of the gods; the other jocose, full of lampoon against one another. Under the former head we may reckon the Dithyrambics of Bacchus, hymns to the gods, and panegyrics upon heroes. Under the second, Iambics and Phallic verses. The first essays were rough, and unpolished; but, by degrees, the great actions of gods and heroes grew more numerous, and increased into set fables: so, in like manner, the jocose compositions began to come under proper regulations. Thus from the former kind arose tragedy; from the latter, satire, comedy, and mimic."....*Vossius*, Lib. II. c. 2.

man art it seems necessary to prevent confusion in the minds of the hearers.

A modern play, you must perceive, is a very different composition, and therefore to confine us to the same narrow limits as the Greek dramatists, is to say mankind shall never improve: yet upon this ridiculous system have critics proceeded; nay, it has even been doubted by some of them whether the moderns have judged well in laying aside the chorus: it certainly added, they allege, both to the magnificence and morality of the stage, as it was always employed in commending virtue; but surely it detracted very much from the probability of the performance. Either the chorus is detached from the tragedy, and then it is quite unnatural, or the persons of the chorus have some connection with the subject, and then it is very difficult for the poet to preserve the probability. As the chorus was first invented, it is no wonder it was retained so long a time; but had the tragedy been first, it is very probable the other would never have had a being.

Upon these principles let us now examine what Aristotle had deemed indispensable....the three unities, of action, time, and place; the first of these I have always thought important to every composition, and I have already shewn in what it consists, namely, the relation of every incident to some great action or end; and it is no less necessary to preserve it in epic poetry than in tragedy. It is essential even to history, for the detail of two narratives at once, or the intermixture of them can only serve to confuse. The common practice is to divide the whole performance into five acts, though this practice has no foundation in nature: the first, it is said, should contain an exposition of the design of the representation; this was formerly performed in a long speech by way of prologue by one actor. Thus it is in Sophocles and Euripides; but the moderns have judged better in making the actors open the subject by discoursing together in the first act. In the second, third, and fourth acts, the plot should proceed and draw towards a crisis, and prepare gradually for the

developement in the fifth act. It is a rule, which should always be observed, that no person should ever come upon the stage and go off again without the reason of his appearance being obvious, and absolutely essential to the plot. Another rule is, that all the persons should be actually engaged in the business of the tragedy, and not introduced merely as hearers of the principal personages. This is a rule which has been greatly neglected by modern writers of tragedies, as the principal persons are commonly attended by a mute companion, or humble friend, who seems to have no other business on the stage than to afford them an opportunity of relating their story.

The second unity is that of time, which (according to those absurd critics who have merely copied from the imperfect sketches left by the ancients) requires that a play should occupy no more time in the supposed action than it does in the representation. Unity of place (according to the same prejudiced judges, who never looked at the origin of the prejudice) required that the scene should be never shifted from one place to another. By observing the first of these, the ancients had great difficulty to find any interesting events which could be supposed to be acted in so short a time; on this account Aristotle himself, who was a slave to precedent, was obliged to change the time, and allowed them twenty-four hours.

That they might not violate the third unity, they were obliged to fix their action in some public place, such as a court or area before a palace; on which account much business was transacted there which ought to have been done in private.

The truth is, as I before observed, these two last unities arose out of the imperfection of the Greek drama. As the chorus never left the stage, the curtain was not let down between the acts. Shakspeare understood nature better than those pedantic critics who have extolled the unities of Aristotle; and surely, according to the modern custom, the spectators can, with no degree of violence upon the imagination while the action

is suspended, suppose a certain time to elapse between the acts; and by a very small effort of the imagination, they can also suppose themselves transported, or the scene shifted, from one place to another.

Upon the whole then, it is plain the moderns have judged rightly in laying aside the chorus; and Shakspeare, who rejected the unities of time and place, has produced the best dramas. Corneille and Racine, on the other hand, are generally very exact in the observation of Aristotle's rules, and their plays are proportionably vapid and lifeless.

The plot and the sentiment in tragedy should conspire to leave favourable impressions and opinions of virtue on the mind; if virtuous men suffer, it must render their virtues more amiable: this may be done by representing their misfortunes as the effects of the vices of others, or of their own failings; but they should never be made to suffer on account of their virtues. Aristotle observes, that the characters brought upon the stage should never be perfectly good or ill, but of a mixed kind. Mr. Addison's Cato is a very stiff character; as he is not affected with his own misfortunes, he does not raise in us that admiration which tragedy is designed to inspire. A stoic philosopher makes a bad hero of a tragedy.

Dr. Blair is justly surprised that the ancient critics have thought the play of Œdipus the most proper subject of tragedy. Œdipus kills his father, and marries his mother, so that he is guilty both of parricide and incest without knowing it; and though he is represented as a person of good moral disposition, he is made to end his days in the most miserable manner. Such a shocking action cannot be supposed to have happened above once or twice in the course of things, if it can be supposed to have happened at all; besides it tends rather to excite horror than pity. Almost a similar subject was chosen by an author of our own times (the late Earl of Orford), with certainly a much better moral, the misery attendant on the indulgence of all inordinate passions; yet that subject was much too shocking

and indecent for the stage; and the manager would have deserved the severest censure who would have presented it to an English audience. I allude to the "Mysterious Mother."

The plot of a tragedy may be either founded upon real history, or be wholly fictitious. Shakspeare chose his subjects from Hollingshead or Stow, or from an old ballad; and in both he has succeeded. And though persons of high rank and fame are well calculated to excite attention in the *dramatis personæ*, yet the tragic muse may often descend into the recesses of private life, and produce perhaps a more interesting picture than if it had even proceeded from a palace. This is evident in the charming tragedy of George Barnwell, and in one which, though inferior in merit is almost equal in moral utility, the Gamester.

There is hardly any subject which can deeply interest the passions that is improper for tragedy. The ancients scarcely ever introduced the passion of love into their dramas; the French, till the time of Voltaire, I believe, never produced a tragedy without it. Shakspeare neither rejects it, nor deems it necessary on all occasions whiningly to introduce it.

The success of every dramatic production will chiefly depend upon the plot being well chosen and interesting. Some of Dr. Young's tragedies, which are now banished from the stage, are much finer as compositions than Douglas; but the interesting story of the latter will always render it popular. Shakspeare's plots are in general very happily chosen, even without excepting his historical plays; for though he has written these in a sort of series, yet he has seized upon the most interesting incidents and events in the reigns which he depicts.

Next to the judicious choice and arrangement of the plot, the greatest excellence of a dramatic piece is the happy display of character. The unity of action (which is the only one I allow) must be here strictly preserved. In common life we observe men at different times swayed by different humours and passions; yet still

there is a discriminating character; there is a turn of mind which evidently distinguishes one man from another. In dramatic representation this unity of character must be nicely preserved; so that a spectator (if blindfold) ought to distinguish the personage who speaks, even without any reference to the voice of the actor. The character should extend through the whole piece; he must not be a different man at the beginning from what he proves in the end. A contrast of characters has been recommended by critics, and in comedy it has certainly an excellent effect, as when the miser is opposed to the prodigal, the fop to the sloven, the loquacious to the sententious. But this does not appear so essential to tragedy, though Mr. Addison, in his Cato, has apparently studied to put all his characters in contrast.

A great error of all our modern tragic poets is making all their characters speak in the same style. They endeavour to mark the character rather by some peculiarity in thought than in the manner of expressing it, whereas both should be observed. Hence their characters are often absurd without being striking, or more frequently are perfectly insipid. Shakspeare possessed that peculiar versatility of talent that his marked characters have not only a peculiarity of thought, but a peculiarity of language. Iago does not express himself like Othello; nor Cassio like either. Hamlet and the King do not speak alike, any more than Hotspur and the Prince. In comedy there is greater scope for this kind of discrimination; but here it is also miserably neglected, unless where the Irish or Scotch accent can be called in aid of a barren imagination.

The language of tragedy must be dignified, yet not too poetical. We must never forget that it is a representation of nature and of conversation. It must not therefore appear too much studied; for that would destroy the pleasing illusion, which is its greatest charm.

On the same principle I abhor soliloquies. What person in real life, except an ideot or madman, ever talks to himself? When we see an actor left upon the stage,

and addressing the audience, for that in fact he does when he soliloquizes (as it is improperly called), the illusion is immediately dissipated, and we no longer see the character, but the actor. How Shakspeare came to be guilty of this grand oversight I can scarcely divine. It must have been either from custom or indolence.

For the same reason a tragedy in rhyme can never interest, because it never can furnish any illusion, or make us for a moment forget the author and actors, and imagine it a reality. Our English blank verse approaches so near to prose, that, when well spoken, the difference is imperceptible. Some of the best parts in Shakspeare are indeed in prose; and Lillo's natural and pathetic dramas entirely so. I have already said that the diction should be suited to the character; so it should be to the subject. A play on a modern or domestic topic should not be in blank verse.

Much nonsense has been advanced by the critics in the form of instructions for dramatic writers. Such as, that no actor should go off the stage more than five times; that the persons of the drama should not exceed a limited number; and that during the course of an act the stage should never be left vacant even for a single moment. All these pretended rules are bravely violated by our English writers; and really I never could see any just argument for them.

For dramatic writing we cannot revert further than the Greeks; for I do not concur with Bishop Lowth in regarding Job or the Canticles as dramatic pieces.

Of the Greek writers Æschylus is harsh and obscure; Sophocles more masterly, correct, and sublime; Euripides soft and tender. In the Greek tragedies, for the reason already assigned, the action was simple, and the incidents few. They are commonly founded on the history of their own nation, which should be an advantage to their descriptions. Hercules furnished six, and the Trojan war no less than seventeen subjects for tragedies. Their declamation (like that of the Italian opera), was set to musical notes; and their chorusses changed from declamation to real song. Their actors

wore a long flowing robe, and were raised on high buskins, called *cothurni*; they also wore masks, which were something like helmets, and were made to represent the persons whose characters they sustained. These masks had large mouths, which, by means of horn or brass plates, the Abbe du Boss ingeniously conjectures, strengthened the voice, and caused them to be heard at a greater distance; but it may very reasonably be asked how would these masks represent the passions? We learn, however, that they had also an expedient for this purpose; the mask was painted so as to represent different passions on each side, and as the actors stood always in profile, they turned that side to the spectators which was most agreeable to their present passion! What a contemptible idea does this give us of the Greek theatre, and yet it is the drama of the Greeks that prejudiced pedants wish us to copy! What is still more extraordinary, we are told that sometimes one player spoke and another acted. We must remember, however, that the ancient theatres were much larger than the modern ones, consequently the masks were of advantage both to the sight and the hearing; and for the same reason, the spectators could not so easily discern the change of countenance in the actors, especially as they acted by day, and their stage was not so well illuminated as ours; and as the masks kept the lips from moving, so that it could scarcely be perceived who spoke, it would not appear so ridiculous to us to have two engaged in the same part as we may imagine.

In France, Corneille and Racine have somewhat improved, though not much, on the Greek drama. They have introduced many more incidents into their plays than were found in the ancient tragedies. Corneille is remarked by the French critics for his sublimity; Racine for describing the tender emotions; but the merit of both appears to me over-rated. Voltaire is more animated than Racine, and more interesting than either him or Corneille. Love always predominates in the French tragedies, and it is in general the love of a petit-maitre. The French are also fantastically delicate,

for they have banished all bloodshed from their stage; but this refinement, some of their own critics acknowledge they have carried too far, and, according to their own countryman Voltaire, they have quite enervated tragedy.

It may perhaps be affirmed that it is only on the English stage that a perfect tragedy is to be seen. It is there that we find the just representation of nature, an action exhibited, such as the historian might narrate. The events not forced or unnatural, nor crowded within too narrow a space. There we see characters such as are to be found in real life, such as serve to conduct the business of the plot in its natural course, and to a natural catastrophe; not stiffly and artificially contrasted, as in the French dramas, where every principal character must have his particular opponent, of different stature, differently habited, of opposite manners; made just to contradict each other, like the buffoons on the stage of the mountebank.

In this as well as in every other department of the drama, Shakspeare necessarily stands alone. His was the infancy of the art, and the whole field was open to him. The judicious Lowth observes, "That the passion of jealousy, its causes, circumstances, progress and effects, are more accurately, more copiously, more satisfactorily described in one drama of Shakspeare, than in all the disputations of philosophy."

Perhaps it may be allowed, in deference to Bishop Lowth's judgment, that the drama to which he refers, Othello, is the most perfect of all our author's productions; and consequently the most perfect tragedy in existence in all its parts. If unity of action is (as I think) an excellence, here every incident contributes to the main design. The characters are incomparably adapted to the action. The unsuspecting simplicity of Othello is well combined with the violence of passion by which he is agitated when he thinks himself abused. When I was a very young man, I used to think the Zanga of Dr. Young a better drawn character than Iago, and so it is according to the artificial rules, "for mak-

ing tragedies," set forth by the tasteless followers of Aristotle, and the French critics; but more knowledge of the world has convinced of my error. Zanga starts up at once a complete villain....He has the whole plot, its circumstances and consequences at once in view. This is not natural: not to speak of the improbability of his treasuring up his revenge, unabated and unchanged, for so great a series of years. We read in Tacitus of one (Tiberius) whose character was "odium in longum jaciens," but this is not the odium of Zanga, stored up for so many years, uneffaced by reiterated kindnesses.

Iago, on the contrary, is a villain only by degrees. Malignant, envious, and fond of mischief, he enters upon his plan at first with only the vague and malevolent design of creating some uneasiness. In every progressive step he finds himself more deeply entangled, till at length in his own defence he is compelled to proceed. Even when the plot is considerably advanced, he sees not the end....

> "Tis here but yet confus'd,
> "Knavery's plain face is never seen till used."

The villainy of Iago is also prompted from time to time by many circumstances; offence, jealousy and resentment at Othello, envy of Cassio, the having cheated, and continuing to cheat Roderigo, all serve to involve him deeper and deeper, and to promote the catastrophe.

The incidents are truly interesting; the theft of the handkerchief, and Othello seeing it in Cassio's hand, are incomparably wrought up. In short, whether in the tumultuous scene in the street, of rousing Brabantio, or in the scenes after the arrival at Cyprus, we can scarcely imagine that it is a fiction which is presented to us.

The poetry of the impassioned parts is of the highest kind, and I think in the concluding speech of Othello there are more beauties than are any where comprised in the same compass.

Such is this astonishing production of human intellect; and yet I feel it almost rashness to pronounce it the master-piece of our author. In Lear there is something still grander, and perhaps the fable is still more generally interesting. Granting that the plots were not his own, still it is the judgment, taste, and genius of Shakspeare that is displayed in selecting such stories as serve for the basis of the most magnificent display of all the great passions incidental to human nature. Who will compare the cold and inanimate declamation of Œdipus, in the Greek tragedy, with the sublime burst of passion, when the old king resents the unfeeling ingratitude of his daughters? But even Œdipus in the hands of Shakspeare, would have been a different character.

One thing I must remark of this exquisite drama, because I have not seen it remarked by others, and that is, the perfect consistency, in the midst of seeming inconsistencies, with which the principal character is supported. Lear is introduced as a very choleric person; and, conscious of the error of his own disposition, and distrustful of himself, it is curious to observe how he doubts the reality of his daughter's ingratitude, and appears desirous of referring at first to his own frailty. Thus, when the unkindness of his eldest daughter is first hinted to him, he observes....

"Thou but rememberest me of mine own faint conception: I have perceived a most faint neglect of late; which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity."

The unity of action is perhaps not quite so well preserved as in Othello. The under plot of Gloster and Edgar presents, it is true, a kind of contrast to the other; but it is not necessary to the main action. All the characters are finely sustained; that of Kent is original, and the most interesting under character perhaps to be found in any drama. Some of the speeches of Lear are highly poetical, especially

"I tax not you, ye elements," &c.

Hamlet is perhaps the most faulty of our author's dramas; and yet it is perhsps the most interesting of them all in the representation. The plot is very ill conducted: the appearance of a ghost violates the probability of the action; and yet, as Dr. Johnson well remarks, "the apparition left the regions of the dead to little purpose: the revenge that was required is not obtained but by the death of him who was required to take it." The murder of Polonius, and the subsequent madness and death of poor Ophelia, who is all along cruelly treated, outrages humanity; and Hamlet's neglect of the opportunity to kill the king when at prayers (and that upon the most shocking of motives, lest from the occasion he might obtain mercy of Heaven) seems to defeat the object of the play; and reduces the author to a very awkward and disgusting catastrophe.

Where then lies the charm of Hamlet? I answer, in the matchless genius of Shakspeare, who has combined in this play more variety of incident, more refinement of moral sentiment, more exquisite displays of human character than are to be found in any other drama. The ghost is such as no other author could have conjured up, solemn, dignified, yet tender and pathetic. The incident of the play exhibited before the court is finely contrived; the spectator's interest is kept alive from the beginning for the fate of Hamlet; and the closet scene with the Queen is perhaps the finest specimen extant of dramatic dialogue. The pictures referred to are undoubtedly supposed to hang against the wall, as part of the furniture of the queen's closet.

Macbeth scarcely holds a lower rank than any of the preceding. I cannot agree with Dr. Johnson, that it is deficient in discrimination of character. I think the progress of wickedness is more finely marked in Macbeth than in any portrait that I have ever found. He commences a brave, honourable, and loyal person. One false step conducts to another, and he becomes gradually so depraved, that he declares

" I am in blood
" Stept in so far, that should I wade no more,
" Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

The machinery, which is grounded upon historical, or at least traditional evidence, is finely supported. I think it is Dryden that says:

" But Shakspeare's magic could not copied be,
" Within that circle none durst walk but he."

And I cannot remark with indignation on the abominable manner in which this incomparable play is commonly represented. The witches, who are designed as very serious characters, are represented by buffoons. On the contrary, instead of the low comedians, the very best declaimers in the theatre ought to support these awful, I had almost said sublime personages; and every exertion should be made to add to the solemnity of the scene.

The versatility of Shakspeare's talents is shewn in Cymbeline, where the passion of jealousy is exhibited under a different form and character to what it assumes in Othello. In his historical plays, the correctness with which the characters are drawn and sustained, as far as historical report enables us to judge, is greatly to be admired. The best I think are Julius Cæsar, and Richard III. In the former it is impossible not to observe how much better the character of Brutus is drawn by Shakspeare, than that of Cato by Mr. Addison.

Next to Shakspeare, our best tragic writer is undoubtedly Otway. Dr. Beattie most unaccountably declares...." That the merit of Venice Preserved, and the Orphan, lies rather in the beauty of particular passages than in the general effect of the whole." If this was the case, it is plain that these plays would only affect and please a few individuals of nice taste and discrimination, whereas the populace are always attracted by them and delighted with them. I believe much fi-

ner passages might be selected from some of Dryden's plays than any which are to be found in Otway, yet these plays do not keep the stage, and are not admired on the whole. In truth a few fine passages will never support any drama. After Otway, Rowe and Young rank highest in the list of English tragic writers.

LETTER XXX.

COMEDY....ARISTOPHANES.....PLAUTUS....TERENCE.... MOLIERE.....SHAKSPEARE.....JONSON.....BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER...DRYDEN...CONGREVE...FARQUHAR ....VANBURGH....STEELE.....ADDISON.....CENTLIVRE..... SHERIDAN.

MY DEAR JOHN,

ON the subject of comedy I shall, I hope, be less prolix than on the other branch of dramatic poetry; for much of what might be said on this topic is anticipated in my last letter. For good compositions of this kind, as well as of the former class, we must look to the moderns, and not to the ancients; indeed, as I observed, a play (strictly so called) may be regarded as a modern invention, at least what the ancients have left us are to be considered only as hints on which modern dramatists have successfully improved. Aristophanes was a mere farce writer, a buffoon, almost destitute of the only qualities that can render buffoonery tolerable, wit and humour. Plautus was much superior, and some of his dramas have both plot and character. Terence, who is regarded as a translator of Menander, is intolerably flat and tedious, and there is a sameness in all his dramas which renders the perusal of them, to me at least, insufferably irksome. In them there is very little of character or wit, nor indeed any one essential of a good play.

As I rejected Aristotle's rules respecting time and place in tragedy, so I think them equally absurd applied to comedy. The unity of action I would still insist upon for a general reason, which has been frequently repeated in the course of these letters.

The object of comedy is commonly regarded as diametrically opposite to that of tragedy; yet I am not

one of that class of critics who condemn those mingled dramas, which sometimes produce seriousness and sorrow, and sometimes levity and laughter. "They approach nearer," says Johnson, "than either (tragedy or comedy) to the appearance of life; they shew how great machinations and slender designs may promote or obviate one another, and the high and low co-operate in the general system of unavoidable concatenation."

As, however, the provinces of each are distinct, though they may occasionally be united in the same production, we may be allowed to consider them under a distinct character.

The ends and principles of tragedy I formerly stated to be the passions of terror and pity; the ludicrous and absurd are the objects of comedy; and while the former is conversant in the great and important transactions of human life, the latter occupies itself with the lesser views and follies of men. The scene of tragedy is best laid in a different country, or at least at a different period of time; but comedy should be suited to the common level of men, and therefore directly contrary in both these respects. Dr. Blair is of opinion that the scene should be most frequently laid in our own country, or at least not too far distant, to expose the reigning foibles: thus the general idea or definition of comedy is a satirical exhibition of the follies and improprieties of mankind. While this is strictly pursued, comedy may answer an excellent purpose, besides that of amusement, and become subservient to the improvement of morals; but in licentious hands it may be, as it too frequently is, made an instrument of corruption.

In writing comedy, as well as tragedy, the first object should be to find a really interesting story or plot, not too intricate, but such as will engage the audience, and keep attention alive. The next is to fill the drama with such an exhibition of characters, as will at once interest and amuse. Much has been said about contrasting the characters, but this is reducing genius to line and rule. The characters should naturally emanate

out of the plot or story, and not be formed upon any mechanical or technical principles. They should be rather diversified than contrasted. To step "from grave to gay, from lively to severe," is a good rule, and where a contrast naturally presents itself, it will contribute to enliven the scene; but probability should never be sacrificed to it.

In comedy something of exaggeration may be permitted. It is indeed a picture of life, but it is a picture in caricature. I believe, in truth, that any exact picture of life would tire or disgust on the stage, where we expect to see something different from what we are every day accustomed to; and for this reason such plays as are the most exact copies of life; such as the Careless Husband, and the Jealous Wife, are the least interesting. Yet nature and probability must not be violated too far, for then it ceases to be a *representation*. The illusion must be kept up to the spectator; he must for the instant believe it real, or the effect is lost. Nothing of a horrid or disgusting nature should be introduced into comedy, for then the cheerfulness and hilarity it is intended to excite would be destroyed. It is needless almost to add, that a comedy should always (for the same reason) have a fortunate conclusion: yet I must remark that, to achieve the end, in many modern comedies all probability is violated. The spendthrift is made frugal, the miser becomes generous; and the greatest contrast is exhibited in the same personage, who is often the complete opposite at the end of the play to what he was in the beginning. The consistency of character is most ably maintained by Shakspeare and Moliere.

The language in comedy should be always adapted to the respective characters. In the mouth of a clown, or a very low person, even vulgar language may be admitted; but the style should in no case be too highly polished or refined, like the language of books. As the piece is a representation of life, so the language should be that of conversation; and any thing above it

is only natural in the mouth of a pedant or very affected person, a Malvolio, a Vellum, or a Malaprop.

The first writers of comedy introduced living characters, and sometimes the most virtuous persons of the age, upon the stage, Socrates himself not excepted. This was, however, attended with great evils and disturbances, and at length they were prohibited by law from the exhibition of any living characters. Aristophanes is the principal author of this description now extant. The wit of these writers was, as I before hinted, of the lowest kind, and their discourses often obscene. What is called the middle comedy was an elusion of the laws, by introducing real characters under feigned names; but we have no author of this kind now remaining. The new comedy consists in drawing pictures and characters, but not living ones.

Plautus and Terence were the most popular comic writers among the Romans. Plautus has more of the truly *comic*; his characters are drawn with strong features, his language is also strong, but coarse. Terence is a strict observer of rules, but fails in strength; and what detracts from his merit is, that he is a constant imitator of the Greeks.

A considerable difference is to be observed between the French and the English comedy. The French are more regular, perhaps more tame; the English are irregular, but interesting and full of plot: I am afraid I must add, that the French are more decorous and chaste. If, indeed, I gave little praise to the French tragic writers, I cannot in justice be equally niggardly of applause to their comic drama. Moliere is himself an host: he abounds in character, wit and humour; his plots are ingenious, lively, and interesting; and in his plays in general we find little to offend a modest ear, or throw ridicule upon virtue. It must be allowed, however, that some of Moliere's plays (the much admired Misanthrope, for instance) are heavy and spiritless. Indeed, the French plays have in general less variety than the English; and perhaps this might in

some measure be accounted for from the nature of their despotic government, which had a tendency to spread a greater uniformity over their behaviour: but it is strange that the French, who are remarkable for their levity, and certainly not praise-worthy for their morals, should so far exceed the English in the decency and decorum of their comedies.

Since the time of Moliere, the French have invented a new kind of comedy, called *Larmoyante*. In this kind of writing, sentiment is more studied than plot or character; the plots chiefly turn on the discovery of some person, a woman, for instance, in mean circumstances, found to be the daughter of some rich man; or a wife finds her husband, whom she imagined lost or dead. This style of writing has also been introduced in England, under the name of sentimental comedy; but the humour of Goldsmith, and the wit of Sheridan, have laughed it off the stage.

In taking a short view of the English comic writers. Shakspeare must occupy not only the first, but the highest place. His dramas, after a lapse of two centuries, are still gazed at with unabated ardour by the populace, are still read with admiration by the scholar. They interest the old and the young, the gallery and the pit, the people and the critic. At their representation appetite is never palled, expectation never disappointed. The changes of fashion have not cast him into shade, the variations of language have not rendered him obsolete. His plots are lively, and command attention; his characters are still new and striking, and his wit is fertile even to exuberance. Perhaps there never was a drama which so happily combined tender sentiment with comic force as "As You Like it:" there is scarcely a character in it which fails to interest. Adam and Jacques, are truly original; and even the buffoonery of the clown is of a superior cast. In the Merchant of Venice the unity of action is somewhat violated by a double plot; but perhaps two plots were never so happily combined as in this play; and one rises so naturally out of the other, that not the smallest confusion is pro-

duced. The comic scenes pleasantly relieve the mind from the effect produced by the serious. The conclusion is unexpected, and the effect of the whole is truly happy. Gratiano appears to me a character which Shakspeare only could have penned; though, from the little interest which he has in the plot, he is less noticed than he would have been for his sportive wit, had he been of more importance to the main action. What an effort of imagination is the Tempest! Magic, the tendency of which is naturally to excite horror and disgust, is converted into an instrument of gaiety and pleasure; and the author can give diversity of character even to ideal beings, or rather seems as much conversant with the world of spirits as with the characters of men. Perhaps the Merry Wives of Windsor is one of the most regular of Shakspeare's comedies; and I scarcely know a play that comes more completely under that description. The principal character, Falstaff, is, however, scarcely so well depicted as in Henry the Fourth. In the scenes with the Prince, when debauchery and cheating are the themes, the old Knight seems more in his proper element than in his rencounter with ladies. It is remarkable that, so early as Shakspeare's time, the paltry stage trick of exciting a vulgar laugh at the broken dialect of a foreigner was in use; a trick which has since been almost the sole support of a comedy, but which was utterly unworthy of the genius of Shakspeare. Much Ado About Nothing, though the subject in some measure justifies the title, is yet abundant in wit and pleasantry; and Measure for Measure, and the Twelfth Night, are truly interesting. The Winter's tale is the most irregular of our author's comedies: there the unity of time is indeed violated beyond all bounds: yet it contains some exquisite strokes of nature and poetry, and many pleasant playful scenes. Of the Midsummer Night's Dream it is difficult to judge by any of the rules of criticism; it is, in every point of view, a most extraordinary piece, and I confess I should like to see it well performed. The scenes between Bottom, Quince, and their compa-

ny of players, are exquisitely humorous. The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour Lost, and the Two Gentlemen of Verona, are the worst of our author's productions, if indeed they are really his.

Ben Jonson may be regarded as next in order of time to Shakspeare, but in genius he is greatly his inferior. Jonson was classically educated, and he endeavoured to reduce the English comedy to the rules of the critics. He studied character rather than plot; but he crowds characters together in an artificial manner, and yet they are less striking than those of Shakspeare. Another circumstance unfavourable to the dramas of Jonson, when compared with those of his great master, is, that Jonson painted from the age in which he lived, Shakspeare from human nature itself. "He's knight of the shire, and represents you all," is a line that will apply to most of the characters of Shakspeare. Hence his plays are in fashion in every age; while those of Jonson are now almost banished from the stage.

Beaumont and Fletcher wrote rather on the model of Shakspeare than of Jonson;* yet in their plots they are somewhat more regular than the former; but the composition is incorrect, though they contain many beauties. Dryden informs us that the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher were the reigning favourites of his time, two of theirs being acted for one of Shakspeare's: they have, however, had their day, for at present only one of them keeps the stage, "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife;" which, notwithstanding a strain of indelicacy in it, is still popular, from the entertainment which it affords, by an interesting plot supported by much humour.

I shall pass over a multitude of comic writers whose plays are now consigned to oblivion, and even Dryden himself, (whose excellence was certainly not comedy, though in the Spanish Friar there is much pleasantry and wit) to mention Congreve, an author of whom you

* With Jonson they were contemporaries.

must have heard much, though I dare believe you have never seen one of his plays performed. The last of them that I remember to have been acted is Love for Love, which is certainly one of his worst. The plays of Congreve, like those of Jonson, are deficient in plot: the characters too are not well discriminated; they are only depicted in the sentiment, for they all speak the same language. They abound in wit, and but little in what is properly called humour. They are, at the same time, disgraced occasionally by gross obscenity.

Farquhar and Vanburgh had both better notions of what a comedy should be than Congreve; yet they are well characterised by Pope....

> "What pert, low dialogue has Farquhar writ!
> "Van wanted grace, who never wanted wit."

One comedy of Vanburgh's, however, which was corrected by Cibber, and therefore passes under their joint names, is excellent, and that is "The Provoked Husband," which is unexceptionable in every respect, except in having a double plot.

The comedies of Mrs. Centlivre are lively and interesting; and it is no small commendation to say, that even at this distance of time two of hers still continue to be popular, "The Wonder," and "A Bold Stroke for a Wife."

Sir Richard Steele must rank among our best comic writers. The hint of his Conscious Lovers is taken from Terence; but how infinitely it is improved! Mr. Addison too succeeded better in comedy than in tragedy; and his Drummer is, in my opinion, one of the very best that ever was written conformably to the rules of Aristotle.

Of the modern stage it would be, in some measure, indecorous to speak; yet I cannot conclude my letter without naming one author of singular merit....you anticipate the name of Sheridan. Perhaps no man since the days of Shakspeare ever possessed equal powers for the drama. We have several other writers, who, if

they do not write for posterity, at least contribute to the entertainment of the present age, and are lively and spirited. Of the translations from the German (so much in fashion) I have seen but one, and that is the Stranger, and I confess it has left me not the slightest wish to see any more from the same manufactory. In its plot it is immoral, and very deficient both in humour and character.

LETTER XXXI.

EPIC POETRY....HOMER....APOLLONIUS RHODIUS....VIRGIL....LUCAN.....TASSO... CAMOENS....ERECILLA....VOLTAIRE....MILTON.

MY DEAR JOHN,

THE day of epic poetry seems in a great measure to be passed by; and it is to be apprehended that no modern epic poem will have any permanent success; the rules, therefore, which I have to lay down, and the criticisms I shall have to advance, will rather respect the past than either the present or the future. In what has been done however, there is an immense field opened for admiration, and it is ever a most pleasing exercise of the mind to review the highest exertions of the human imagination, and to enumerate the triumphs of human genius.

Men destitute of taste may pass by with a supercilious contempt the petty wars between a few piratical states of Greece, and a town (so contemptible that the ruins are not even extant) on the opposite shore. But the work of Homer, which could make great things out of small, must still be contemplated, like the pyramids of Egypt, as an object which, being the work of man, cannot fail to interest us, while we feel we are men. No person in his senses believes the fabulous voyage of Æneas from Troy to Italy, much less the descent of the Cæsars from Ascanius; but every *line* of the poem which celebrates these imaginary topics contains fine poetical beauty; and while we read, in opposition to conviction, we involuntarily

"Hold each strange tale devoutly true."

Such is the charm of real poetry, and may I ever be such an intellectual epicure as to relish heartily these mental illusions!

" Perish that critic pride, which oft has hurl'd
" Its empty thunders o'er the epic world;
" Which, eager to extend its mimic reign,
" Would bind free fancy in a servile chain;
" With papal rage the eye of genius blind,
" And bar the gates of glory on the mind.

To be diffuse in precepts for what I deem almost impracticable, you must perceive would be absurd. Or if we admit that some genius of a superior cast should hereafter appear, he will be able to make laws for himself. A second Bonaparte, he will establish a new code of legislation for other nations of the world.

An epic poem is a representation, and in part a dramatic representation, of some important action.* Yet it essentially differs from all pieces composed for scenic exhibition. Dramatic compositions distinguish characters by the passions, epic poems by the actions. In an epic poem, however, there are three objects to be considered, the action, actors, and narrative. First, it is necessary that the ACTION should be *one*. I have had occasion often to shew the necessity of unity of action in every composition; and I may add, that this makes a fuller impression on the hearers than a number of incidents which have no connexion with one another. The unity of action has particularly been expected in this kind of composition, even since Aristotle's time, who first took particular notice of it; but it must not be a slight unity, as the action of one man, but a strict connection, a train of means pointing to some end; so the main end of the Æneid is the establishment of Æneas in Italy. In the Odyssey, it is the return of Ulysses to Ithaca; and in the Iliad, the effects of the resentment

* Οτι δη τους μυθους καθαπερ οι τας τραγωδιας συνιστανται δραματικους. ARIST. Περι ποιητικης, c. 3. TRAPP, Prelect. Lec. xxix.

of Achilles. Though it is not so sensible in the Odyssey, as the poet begins in the middle of the subject, yet it is more pleasant than in the Iliad, where we must always look back for the causes of the action to the commencement of the poem. Milton is very accurate as to unity. By closely adhering to unity, I do not however mean that every event should be exactly narrated according to the order of time, or that the poet should be always confined to one single action; he may, consistently with unity, introduce several episodes into his poem, but these must not be digressions from the main end and action, but lesser acts or inferior incidents. The word episode is derived from tragedy; the song of the chorus was the original part of that performance, and all the speeches which are introduced to give some respite to the chorus, were called episodes. The word, however, is employed in a different sense by the moderns; for by them it is something not essential to the main action, but related or connected with it. Thus the adventures of Ulysses with Polyphemus, Circe, the Syrens, &c. are episodes. They have all some tendency to carry on the chief design; yet they are not so essentially necessary, but that any of them might be taken away without breaking in upon the chief action. Such are the adventures of Nisus and Euryalus, and the funeral games in Virgil. The descent of Æneas into hell is one part of the main action; but all things which happen there, except consulting his father, are episodes. It has been established as a general rule, that episodes ought never to be foreign to the main design, and that they ought not to be too long. As they are intended to diversify the poem, their chief design is ornament, and therefore they should be particularly elegant and finished. An epic poem on the whole should be entire or complete, according to Aristotle, and should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, which certainly is nonsense when applied to epic poetry exclusively, as it may serve for every composition which is not the raving of a madman. Again, the action must be great and interesting, and such as may justify the apparatus the poet

has been at the pains to set before us. This is sufficiently evident, nor have any of the great poets failed in the choice of their action. Hence it may be asked, whether an epic poem ought uniformly to end well? It appears most probable it ought; for as the time is much longer than that of tragedy, to end miserably after the recital of so many misfortunes, would too deeply distress the mind. Milton, however, is an exception; but it may be doubted whether he is happy in this respect. The subject of an epic poem should not be of too recent date: it should never be written from any history with which we are well acquainted; for the imagination may sport with the events and characters of former ages, and we can easily believe the latter much more perfect, than those with whom we are in a manner acquainted. Lucan and Voltaire are the only poets who have acted contrary to this rule. The *time* or duration of the *action* may, according to the critics, be considerably longer in an epic poem than a dramatic composition: the action of the Iliad employs forty-seven days,* that of the Æneid five years and a half, and the Odyssey about eight years. But if we compute, according to some, from the sailing of Ulysses from the isle of Calypso, and the dispersion of the fleet of Æneas, the latter only occupies fifty-eight days, and the former one year and seven months.†

There are some reasons why an epic poem should commence somewhere in the course of the action, indeed near the conclusion: 1st, because of the variety which it gives to the poem, by making it in part dramatic, and putting a part of the narrative into the mouth of the principal character; 2d, because it excuses the poet from that minuteness, and consequent tediousness, which would be necessary in pursuing the hero through every circumstance of the narrative; 3d, the introduction of a part of the narrative in that way pleases by the air and ingenuity which is displayed by the poet in the

* Bossu. † Ibid.

manner of introducing it, and the surprise it occasions; 4thly, it affords room for more animated strokes of passion, than if the whole story was told by the poet....

"Quæ ipse miserrima vidi,
"Et quorum pars magna fui. Quis talia fando
"Temperet a lachrymis," &c. *Virg.*

"Those direful scenes I saw on Phrygia's shore,
"Those wars in which so large a part I bore,
"The fiercest Argive would with tears bewail," &c.
Pitt.

As in the drama, so in epic poetry, the characters should be properly adapted to the plot, and should seem to rise naturally out of it. Each individual must be possessed of peculiar features, to distinguish him from others. Homer excels in this part; the characters of Virgil are more general, and not so easily distinguished. The only particular and well-drawn character in the Æneid is Dido, which is strongly marked. The epic however, with respect to character, differs from the drama essentially in one instance. In the drama supernatural beings, and particularly the deities of a superior order, are almost interdicted. In an epic poem, on the contrary, they are always expected. Why this low, mean, and inexpressive term *machinery* has been applied to this portion of epic poetry I have never seen rationally accounted for. It has arisen, I apprehend, among modern critics, from some metaphysical notion, that all the events of the poem are *put in motion* by the machinery of supernatural agency. Thus in Homer, where any thing wonderful is recounted it is ascribed to the gods, as when the horse of Achilles speaks.....

Ανδηνεντα δ'εθηκε θεα λευκωλενος Ηρη.
Il. xix. v. 407.

"Then, strange to tell (so *Juno will'd*) he broke
"Eternal silence, and portentous spoke." *Pope.*

The machinery of every epic poem should be such as is consonant to the popular belief at the time the poem is composed, otherwise it will be coldly introduced by the poet, and without effect to the reader. Allegorical machinery only serves to remind us that we are perusing fiction; and neither this, nor obsolete mythology can awaken the passions of awe and terror. After all, machinery should be sparingly used, and with great discretion, for in epic poetry as well as tragedy the rule is a good one....

> "Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus."
> *De Art. Poet.* v. 191.

> "Nor let a god in person stand display'd,
> "Unless the labouring plot deserve his aid." *Francis.*

Homer makes perhaps too free use of his machinery; and indeed debases his divinities below the characters of men; but the Greek mythology was but a clumsy and puerile system. It can only please children, and is justly exposed to the sarcastic censure of Lactantius, and the ridicule of Lucian.

If the difficulty of composing a good epic poem is so great as all critics have concurred in representing it; if the fable must be happy, popular and interesting; the characters well chosen, striking and new, and the poetry abounding in every charm of verse, we cannot wonder, if in such long undertakings, so few have succeeded. Yet every age has been fertile in epic poems. Petrarch, and even Boccacio, composed each one. Sir Richard Blackmore produced no less than four, and even in our own time some compositions of this description, and of considerable merit, have made their appearance.

But, whatever may be the fate of our contemporary epic poets, very few of those who have preceded them have met with that attention from posterity with which their authors doubtless flattered themselves, and which perhaps many of them might really deserve. Perhaps

very long poems have a natural tendency to sink into oblivion by their own weight, unless supported by some very striking circumstances, or something peculiarly interesting in the plot, or fable; while a short poem may subsist on one brilliant passage. Even the charitable muse of Mr. Hayley can summon but a few as worthy candidates to the epic banquet, though he seems to have pressed Dante, Ariosto, and even Gresset, whose hero is a parrot, into the service. I shall present you with a still less voluminous catalogue.

Homer is not only the first epic poet, but one of the first of poets. Mr. Pope, I think, calls the Iliad "the oldest book extant, except the Bible." Yet I think I perceive some internal evidence to induce me to believe him a little posterior to Hesiod. If we consider the period at which he composed, the works of Homer can scarcely be contemplated with sufficient admiration. Not that I am prepared to join in the praises which distempered pedants have lavished on this wonderful person. I cannot find in him every art and science. I cannot agree that "the philosopher discovers in him the first rudiments of moral knowledge, or the physician the science of diseases and their cures." "The astronomer and the legislator" must resort to superior authority. Still the Iliad and Odyssey are wonderful productions. In the original no small share of their utility and interest arises from the striking and evidently correct picture which they exhibit of the manners, language, modes of thinking and of acting at so early a period of society. This effect is lost in Mr. Pope's translation, but in return he has presented us with poems richer than the originals in every poetical beauty. I feel myself confirmed in this last sentiment not only by the verdict of Dr. Johnson (always a high authority), but by the fact, that no literal translation of Homer has ever been acceptable to the public taste. There is a *curiosa felicitas* in the original language of every good author which cannot be transfused, and Mr. Pope, as he *could* not give us every excellence of Homer, was right to compensate for the loss by some

beauties of his own. In his English Homer he has brought his author nearer to the character and standard of Virgil's Æneid. Yet the version, where the subject and sentiment of the author would admit of it, is much more literal, correct, and even condensed, than might have been expected. I say condensed, for it is the nature of translation to expand by periphrasis, rather than to keep within the bounds and limtts of the original. Dr. Johnson says of Mr. Pope, that "he has left in his Homer a treasure of poetical elegance to posterity. His version may be said to have *tuned* the English tongue; for since its appearance no writer, however deficient in other powers, has wanted melody. Such a series of lines, so elaborately corrected, and so sweetly modulated, took possession of the public ear, the vulgar was enamoured of the poem, and the learned wondered at the translation."

A question has been lately agitated, which however does not in my opinion admit of a debate. It has been gravely asserted that the Illiad and Odyssey have been composed in detached fragments, and by different hands; that these fragments were afterwards collected and (I can use no other than a vulgar term) patched together, and each made into a whole. It would really be to insult your understanding to argue in detail on such an absurd hypothesis. Unity of action is one of the great praises of Homer, especially in the Iliad. The fable is one complete plot, all the incidents tending to the same end. More than this, there is even a unity of character, and this is preserved religiously through each poem. We know, and almost anticipate (after we are acquainted with the characters) what Nestor, Achilles, or Ulysses will say upon any subject. Can such a poem then be the work of different persons without union or correspondence with each other? Can any thing in criticism itself be more absurd than such a supposition? But further still, there is even in Homer a uniformity of language and style. Every author has a vocabulary of his own, and Homer's is not extremely copious. The same words and phrases continually occur, and some-

times the same verses. Where are the breaks, the junctures? where is the hand of the compiler who put these fragments together discernible? who has discovered, or who can discover interpolation in Homer? That different portions of such large poems might be dispersed in various hands throughout Greece, is very probable, from the difficulty at that period of obtaining transcripts of the whole. Many of these might be collected and collated in order to make the copy more complete. But both the Iliad and Odyssey bear every mark of proceeding from the same mind, and each was unquestionably from the first a perfect whole. What an age must it have been indeed to produce seven or eight poets, who could write like Homer? Why had we not as many Shakspeare's in the reign of Elizabeth?

The Iliad and Odyssey may be regarded as models for all epic writers. In taking a hasty view of the former of these poems, I would observe than when we open the Iliad, we must prepare ourselves for a picture of the ancient world; without this reflection we shall lose many of its beauties, which I observed consist in giving us a lively delineation or description of the early ages. In the days of Homer, for instance, the ordering of an entertainment was an action of importance; the greatest heroes were allowed to praise themselves, and to indulge in the most bitter invectives against their enemies, neither consistent with the modern notions of politeness, or even decency. In the opening of the Iliad we find none of that dignity we should now expect at the commencement of an epic poem. Two chiefs contend for a female captive, which to us appears a subject of small importance, yet this is the point upon which the whole action turns. The priest of Apollo demands his daughter, who had been given to Agamemnon, and upon his being compelled to resign her, he forces Briseis from Achilles, who on this account withdraws his troops from assisting the Greeks against the Trojans, and from his anger all the train of actions follow.

The subject of the Iliad is, however, well chosen; there was no object more splendid or of greater dignity than the war of Troy, at the period the poet wrote; for Homer lived about the second or third century after the Trojan war, when every thing was magnified by tradition. As there was at that time no regular record of public transactions, the real actions performed in these wars must have been in some degree obscured, so that the poet was allowed to connect them with what fables he pleased, if they did not contradict the tradition. He has not, however, chosen the whole war for his subject, but only one of the latter scenes, and indeed the most important of the whole.

All the different incidents are disposed in the most regular manner, and Achilles, the principal hero, is never out of our view through the whole. Homer excels all poets in characteristic expression; that which Virgil expresses in a short sentence, furnishes Homer with matter for a long conversation. He is dramatic throughout, and this mode of expressing himself has great advantages, for undoubtedly to set the person before our eyes will make a stronger impression upon the reader than the simple recital of facts by the poet. All his characters, as I before observed, are strongly marked. No two of his heroes act or speak alike. Even Priam and Paris are characters. The female personages have their peculiar features. The picture of Helen is finely drawn in his third book; the poet takes care she shall never appear odious, still blending some virtues with her vices: she is a character which, though we must condemn, we cannot hate; and yet she is nicely contrasted with the chaste and amiable Andromache.

The machinery of Homer is perhaps the most defective part of his poems; but this was not his fault, but that of the puerile mythology which he was obliged to follow. His gods are mere men, and hardly so respectable as his heroes.

On the Odyssey I differ from the majority of critics, for it seems to me to possess more genius than the

Iliad. That imagination must have been most fertile that could invent such a story, and carry it through the various incidents with such consummate art and address. The adventures of Ulysses among the Sirens, the Cyclops, and in the islands of Circe, are more entertaining than any romance that ever was penned. The Odyssey has also more domestic incident than the Iliad: it presents us with more pleasing and more exact pictures of the ancient manners. Eumeus, for instance, is a character beloved by every reader; and the natural incident of the old and faithful dog must touch every heart. Perhaps the latter parts are tedious and languid: Ulysses seems to remain too long undiscovered among the suitors: the difficulty with which Penelope is convinced of the reality of her husband's arrival, deprives us of those emotions we expected from the discovery, and the conclusion is perhaps abrupt. The travels of Telemachus are all episodes, and we cannot easily see the connection of his adventures with the rest of the poem; in every other part the unity is well preserved, and it occupies only forty-one days from the proper opening of the poem.

The difficulty of succeeding in this species of composition is, I think, sufficiently apparent, when we reflect that Greece, the very soil of genius, where imagination flourished as the beauties of the vegetable world under a tropical sun, has left to posterity only two epic poems, and those by the same master, and on the same subject.

An amiable poet, and an excellent critic of our own times has, however, brought forward another Grecian candidate for epic fame. As I confess myself not conversant with the poem of Apollonius Rhodius, I must satisfy myself with transcribing Mr. Hayley's character of that author....

"Yet may not judgment, with severe disdain,
"Slight the young RHODIAN's variegated strain;
"Tho' with less force he strike an humbler shell,
"Beneath his hand the notes of passion swell.

" His tender genius, with alluring art,
" Displays the tumult of the virgin's heart,
" When love, like quivering rays that never rest,
" Darts thro' each vein, and vibrates in her breast.
" Tho' nature feel his verse, tho' she declare,
" Medea's magic is still potent there,
" Yet fancy sees the slighted poet rove,
" In pensive anger thro' th' Elysian grove.
" From critic shades, where supercilious pride,
" His song neglected, or his powers decried,
" He turns indignant....unopprest by fears,
" Behold, he seeks the sentence of his peers,
" See their just band his honest claim allow."

The Iliad and Odyssey undoubtedly gave birth to the Æneid, and Virgil has imitated Homer in very many instances. Yet the Æneid has quite a distinct character from both the poems of Homer, and the Roman poet is essentially different from the Greek. Homer wrote in a rude and barbarous age; Virgil at a period when manners were civilized, and science very generally diffused. " He therefore (as Dr. Johnson remarks), found the state of the world so much altered, and the demand for elegance so much increased, that mere nature could be endured no longer; and perhaps in the multitude of borrowed passages, very few can be shewn which he has not embellished,"

" There is a time (adds this venerable critic) when nations emerging from barbarity, and falling into regular subordination, gain leisure to grow wise, and feel the shame of ignorance, and the craving pain of unsatisfied curiosity. To this hunger of the mind plain sense is grateful; that which fills the void removes uneasiness, and to be free from pain for a while is pleasure; but repletion generates fastidiousness; a saturated intellect soon becomes luxurious, and knowledge finds no willing reception till it is recommended by artificial diction. Thus it will be found in the progress of learning, that in all nations the first writers are simple, and that every age improves in elegance."

The grand characteristic therefore of Virgil, as opposed to Homer (and perhaps to all other poets), is

elegance. Yet he is extremely happy in the choice of his subject, for never could he have chosen one more interesting to the Romans, than that of deducing their origin from Æneas. Virgil combines the plot of the Odyssey with that of the Iliad, and there is, perhaps, no where to be found so complete a subject for an epic poem; the unity is exactly preserved through the whole; but there is almost no character marked in the Æneid, and the personages are only made known to us by their names. Æneas is pious and brave, but not interesting; he is eloquent, but not fervid; he is a warrior, without fire and spirit; and a lover without gallantry. Dido is the only character that is strongly marked; her unhappy, yet finely described passions, render her much more animated than any of the rest. We must admit, however, that Virgil excels in narration; and perhaps there never was a more finished specimen of poetry in this line, or one more abounding in animated and interesting description than the second Æneid. The third is also beautiful, and has all the charm of variety and entertainment. Some passages of the fourth are also incomparable. It has been remarked that the last six books of the Æneid are inferior to the former, and that the genius of the poet seems to lose somewhat of its former vigour. This I believe will be found to result from the nature of the subject, which is less susceptible of beauties; and unfortunately all the most interesting parts of the poem are the first read.

One sensation I have felt with respect to Virgil, whether it may correspond or not with those of other men I cannot tell. In reading the Æneid for any length of time, in an uninterrupted series, I find the appetite paled as by an excess of sweetness; but when I casually encounter a short quotation from it, I feel charmed. There is in every thought, in every phrase, something that arrests attention. The richness of his diction, the *curiosa felicitas*, is such, that almost every word seems to fill the mind with various images, and to excite grand or pleasing ideas. I have remarked the same with respect to annotations from Milton and Hudibras.

Great must be the excellence of that poetry, or wit, which can make such an impression by piece-meal....

" Disjecta membra poetæ,"

and which will bear so nice an inspection. It reminds me of some exquisite pieces of machinery, the ingenuity and excellence of which are chiefly discovered when they are viewed through a microscope.

The next epic poem of consequence which the genius of Rome produced, is the " Pharsalia" of Lucan. He is universally allowed to hold an inferior rank to both Homer and Virgil; and his failure is generally ascribed to the recent date of the facts which form the subject of it, and the want of the usual machinery. I cannot conceive, however, that the mere story of the Pharsalia, even if narrated by an historian, is inferior to that of the Iliad, embellished even by the invention of the poet; and I am sure the machinery of Lucan is much more sublime than that of either Homer or Virgil; of this a single instance will be sufficient, the description of the sorceress in the sixth book. The truth is, that Lucan wants the invention of Homer, and the polish and elegance of Virgil. There is nothing in the Pharsalia which, as an effort of the imagination, can compare with the scenes and adventures described in the Odyssey. Lucan narrates his story too much in the way of an historian, without variety of arrangement and embellishment. In style he is exceedingly inferior to Virgil; his colouring is less vivid; his figures are often trite, and sometimes imperfect, and his diction by no means so happily chosen as that of Virgil. For all these faults there is sufficient excuse; we must regard the work of Lucan as the unfinished production of a very young man: for he was murdered by the execrable tyrant Nero at the age of twenty-six; and though he may be allowed a less portion of poetical merit, strictly so speaking, than the two great masters of epic, yet for the bold and philosophical sentiments, the manly eloquence, and the grandeur and importance of the nar-

ration, the Pharsalia is read, and probably will continue to be read with greater pleasure than most productions of the epic muse. "Let us remember," says Mr. Hayley, "that in in the most polished nations of Europe the most elevated and poetic spirits have been his warmest admirers: thus in France he was idolized by Corneille, and in England translated by Rowe." Dr. Johnson regards Mr. Rowe's Lucan as the second translation in our language; but I think it is at least rivalled by Mr. Mickle's Lusiad.

The next epic poem which demands our attention is Tasso's *Giurusalemme Liberata*. It is founded on a grand, heroic, and venerable enterprise. The author's invention is noble and fertile: the events are striking and sufficiently diversified, by the tenderness of love and the fierceness of war: the heroes are well characterized. Godfrey is represented as generous, moderate, and brave: Tancred is tender and impassioned: Rinaldo, who is the principal hero, is drawn after Homer's Achilles. The machinery of Tasso is to me more interesting than that of any other poet. The fourth and ninth book contain some incomparable passages and descriptions; but some have thought that his demons act too great a part. The plot seems to turn too much upon enchantment. Rinaldo, leaves the army in discontent, and retires into a desart island, where he is confined by spells. The chiefs are informed of the necessity of his presence to their success; hence some of them are sent in quest of him: they find him in this island, break the spells of the demon, who endeavours to detain them, and then hurry him along with them to the army, where he breaks all the enchantments which retard their success: after this every thing proceeds happily to a conclusion. The whole of the sixteenth and seventeenth books are more worthy the genius of Ariosto than of Tasso. His descriptions, however, are fine, and rise happily towards the conclusion: the language is harmonious and elegant; and the poem in general displays infinitely more genius than Voltaire's Henriade.

Camoens, the epic poet of Portugal, was contemporary with Tasso. I am extremely partial to this poem. I read the original many years ago; but it was little known in England, till an excellent translation was published by the late Mr. Mickle. The poem has infinite merit; every part of it interests and entertains; and it is justly entitled to the appellation of epic. You are aware that the subject is the discovery of India by Vasco de Gama. The characters in general are tolerably well drawn, but not so well supported as might be wished. The subject too, you will be inclined to observe, is too recent, and the cruelties which the Portuguese committed naturally prejudice us against it. Notwithstanding this, the subject is novel and grand; it affords an admirable scope for description, and for the introduction of very interesting scenes. If Paradise Lost is emphatically styled the epic poem of religion, this justly may be denominated that of commerce; and if we read Homer and Virgil for pleasure, and to admire the poetry, let me add, we cannot read this without reaping some further improvement, a knowledge of nature and of the globe which we inhabit.

Spain can also boast of an epic poem of no inconsiderable merit, as appears from the sketch with which Mr. Hayley has favoured us, the Arancana of Don Alonzo de Erecilla. This epic poem differs from all others, for the author celebrates a course of military actions in which he had himself a share, the reduction, by the Spaniards, of the Arancanians, an Indian nation of singular heroism, in the country of Chili. The poem certainly contains fine passages, but is much inferior to the Lusiad of Camoens. It has not yet been translated into English.

The Henriade of Voltaire seems to demand a few observations. As this was written by a person of extraordinary genius, we are led to expect something uncommon: his boldness in attempting an epic poem in this age deserves our admiration; but the French language seems improper for epic poetry, and the author has failed in other respects. The subject of the poem

is the triumph of Henry IV. over the arms of the League: it lies under the same disadvantage with respect to the recentness of the date, &c. with Lucan's Pharsalia; and it would have been better had the author followed the example of Lucan, which he recommends as judicious, concerning the machinery. The poem opens with an interview between Henry, and Elizabeth, Queen of England. He has used fiction in order to bring together these two great personages, and to give his hero an opportunity of relating the exploits of the wars. Now it is well known to every one that Henry never was in England: besides, though Virgil makes Æneas properly enough relate his adventures to Dido, who cannot be supposed to have had any particular account of them; yet we cannot suppose the Queen of England could be ignorant of what was done by the French King, until he came himself to inform her. The whole poem is employed on the subject of a civil war of the most detestable and bloody kind, and which presents ideas too shocking to the mind to excite our admiration. His episodes also are not full, for the poem is not long, yet it contains a great many important events, which are generally related in a very imperfect manner. But he is peculiarly unhappy with respect to the machinery; he has introduced chiefly allegorical beings, as Discord, War, Fanaticism, La Politique, and Love, which are the worst that can be employed in epic poetry. By mixing truth and falsehood together they render the whole improbable. The appearance of St. Lewis to Henry IV. is, however, much better; the whole is wrought up with great judgment, and is certainly one of the best parts of the poem. The descent into hell is also well managed.

Although Voltaire is not conspicuous for his zeal for religion, yet he understood the necessity of it in his poetry; hence it is full of the most noble and generous sentiments, and in these consist its greatest merit.

Though Milton's Paradise Lost was published long anterior to the poem I last noticed, the custom I have followed of considering the British writers the last in

order, seems to justify my present arrangement. After the criticisms of Mr. Addison and Dr. Johnson, which are in every body's hands, there remains but little to be said upon this extraordinary performance. This being the case, my own sentiments will, I am sure, please you better than those of any other critic. Whether from the nature of his subject, with which every person is familiar: or whether, from any defect of the arrangement, Milton pleases more in detached parts than in the whole. With the plot or fable we are perfectly acquainted; and it is unfortunate for Milton, though happy for society, that the Bible is universally read. The plot does not to me appear to warrant so extensive a detail. The poet probably indulged his own inclination and habits in the middle book, when he makes....

"God the Father turn a school divine."

But he should have had some mercy on his readers, who might not have so strong a relish for these metaphysical disputations as he had himself. Yet even this is curious and interesting, not indeed to the multitude, but to all persons who think, and who wish to know the state of theological opinions at that period of time in which Milton wrote. These discussions, I must observe also, are maintained with dignity, and supported with all the ingenuity and learning that was possible. Milton was perhaps the most learned man of his time; his learning is apparent in almost every line that he has composed; and so far the least interesting parts of Paradise Lost are valuable, as affording an animated picture of the knowledge of the times.

This however is foreign to his praise as an epic poet. In that view we must allow his plot to be regular, his action undisturbed by any collateral circumstances, his characters (in Pandemonium at least) strongly marked and well defined. But still he seems to have protracted his plot beyond the proper limits; and therefore, as Dr. Johnson remarks of the Paradise Lost, "its perusal is

rather a duty than a pleasure; it is one of those books which the reader admires, and lays down and forgets to take up again." To one excellence of Milton, however, the great critic, whom I have cited, is blind. Milton was a great admirer of the beauties of nature, though he proclaims his ignorance of natural science, in a passage in the Allegro....

"Or the twisted eglantine,"

where he undoubtedly confounds the sweetbriar with the woodbine. Still he was an admirer of nature, and in his System of Education, recommends, in the strongest terms, the study of natural philosophy, and natural history. Indeed I know nothing which tends more to expand the mind, and also to afford it rest and complacency in the vexatious turmoils of human life. All that proceeds from the hand of God is good; much that comes from the exertions of man partakes of that frailty and depravity of which he is the natural heir. But the great critic and moralist whom I have just quoted (Dr. Johnson), was somewhat limited in his views. His maxim was....

"The proper study of mankind is man."

He therefore could not relish many of the beauties of Milton, which depend upon allusions to the works of nature.

We then assign to Milton all the excellencies of a regular plot or fable. We allow that he is admirable in his delineation of character, except that he fails (as every human intellect must fail) in depicting the Supreme Majesty; but we must allow that he has preserved the unity of action, and has finished his catastrophe with inimitable pathos and effect; and we must also allow that the exuberance of his genius has protracted the action much longer than was consistent with the laws of epic poetry, or the reader's patience. Had

the Paradise Lost been comprised in six books instead of twenty-four, no poem, ancient or modern, could have been brought into competition with it.

If I thus presume to censure the plan and arrangement of this extraordinary poem, let me do it justice in a point of view where I cannot apprehend opposition. It is a Thesaurus of poetical beauties. The thoughts, the figures, the language, the verse, are unrivalled. Dryden and Gray, I might perhaps add Pope, have profited largely from the happy combinations, and the bold application of language to be found in this poem. Even Shakspeare himself seldom dared to deviate from the universal idiom; but Milton taught us the full force of the English language; he even enriched it. His poems would furnish a vocabulary copious enough for every purpose of rhetorical or poetical composition. His imagination was so active, his knowledge was so unbounded, that every line is replete with curious information, with striking sentiment, or with poetical fancy. At the same time he draws a picture as no other man could have drawn it....Not to speak of his delineation of Satan, and the other characters in the infernal regions; not to instance the soft and tender description of the state of our first parents; can any thing equal the pathos and beauty of that passage which relates their expulsion from Paradise?

Whatever may be his faults, great is the praise of that man, to whom even the fastidiousness of criticism must assign the laurelled crown as the first lyric, and the first epic poet, of perhaps the most exalted nation in science and in literature on the face of the earth.

I cannot help observing, that the whole fabric of Paradise Lost, except the mere naked narrative of the Fall, is founded upon the most slender authority imaginable, two or three short, obscure, and ill-understood passages, chiefly in the Epistle of St. Jude; and yet it forms at present a part of our popular theology. Our grandsires, and even perhaps many grave Doctors of Divinity, would exclaim against the impiety of that

man who would dare to question a syllable of the authenticity of all that he has related, of the war in heaven, of the state of the rebellious spirits, &c. &c. This is a new proof of the preponderancy of Milton's genius, as well as of his popularity.

LETTER XXXII.

ON THE USES OF CLASSICAL LEARNING.

MY DEAR JOHN,

I CANNOT better close a correspondence which has had so much reference to the classical writers, than by a short view of the uses and advantages of classical learning. The substance of what I shall advance on this subject was published some years ago in one of the volumes of the Memoirs of the Manchester Philosophical and Literary Society; but as that work is, I believe, out of print, and not likely to be reprinted, you will not be sorry to see what were then my sentiments on this important topic.

The study of ancient languages, the Greek and Latin at least, and of what are usually termed the classical authors in those languages, has, for some centuries, constituted a branch of liberal education, in every refined nation in this quarter of the globe. It appears, indeed, no more than a just tribute to the labours of antiquity, that posterity should not ungratefully consign them to unmerited oblivion; nor even content itself with contemplating that imperfect copy of their features, which a translation exhibits. It is a curiosity natural to the human mind, a becoming pride, to wish as intimate an acquaintance as possible with the illustrious dead; to hold, in a manner, a friendly conversation with them, in their own language, and in their own peculiar style.

If these, however, were the only reasons for the cultivation of classical literature, though they might interest the philosopher, and the man of taste, still we could not in justice allow them that universal cogency, which is necessary to sanction a general practice. There must be other motives to warrant the hardship, which

is imposed on almost every well-born youth, of consuming in severe study several of the most gay and delightful years of life, and of encountering hardships, which nothing but an object of some importance can justify.

Without wishing to appear a lover of paradox, I cannot dissemble that I do not in my own mind allow much force to the maxim which insists on the absolute necessity of classical learning in what are called the professions. I confess, I think it a most pernicious pedantry, which would involve in any kind of mystery those sciences which are most essential to human happiness. The Christian world has been no gainer either as to piety or morals by speculative divinity; all that is necessary to mankind in theology ought to be, and I doubt not is, plain and easy to be comprehended by every capacity. What! shall none but Greek and Latin scholars be permitted to employ their reason on the most necessary topics? Admitting that there ought to be men in the Christian church who should be able to read the holy scriptures in their original languages, to correct mistranslations, to compare and collate manuscripts, and to detect errors of every kind; must every plain country clergyman be an adept in languages, which cannot afford him the least assistance in instructing and informing the poor and illiterate flock, which is committed to his care?....He cannot preach in Latin; the plainest and least pedantic style is that which will be most beneficial to his hearers; nay, the formality of college manners, or the unyielding spirit of literary arrogance, are perhaps qualities, more directly than others, calculated to obstruct or to frustrate his pious labours.

In medicine, I am sure, the use of a dead language has impeded rather than advanced science. Who will pretend to allege that the modern practitioner is obliged to have recourse to the ancients for the principles of his art? The English language, if we include the translations from foreign authors, contains a body of medicine, ample and voluminous enough to engage the attention of most practitioners, and to furnish them with

every useful kind of information. Would it not really be better for mankind, would it not prevent the most fatal mistakes, if prescriptions were written in our own language, instead of those uncouth characters, which frequently appear like hieroglyphics, and are too often absolutely so to those who are to prepare the medicine? In short, ought not a science which concerns the first of temporal possessions, to be laid as open as possible to the reason of mankind?....Ought it not to be industriously weeded of all technical jargon?....Ought not every thinking person to be invited and encouraged to pay some attention to the progress of those diseases, which he may have an opportunity of observing, and to bring in with confidence, let them be right or wrong, his quota of discoveries to the common stock? I do not believe such a circumstance would be injurious to the health of the community, or discouraging to the regular practitioner.....It is only by knowing the outlines at least of medicine, and of the sciences subordinate to it, that any person can estimate truly the value of a physician, or see the necessity of long instruction and much practice, to accomplish a man in this important art. Is it not the ignorance of the public on these points, that gives countenance to quackery; and is it not, because the science is treated as a kind of mystery, that every antiquated female is possessed of some infallible nostrum? In other arts or professions, the knowledge of Latin is not insisted on as a necessary qualification, and yet no person, not regularly brought up to them, presumes to intrude himself into these professions. In a word, let no man practice physic who shall not be regularly educated or instructed in it; but in the name of reason, what has the writing or speaking of Latin to do with the cure of diseases.

I grant that some useful treatises in medicine are occasionally published in Latin, but these are few, and the argument will equally apply to the necessity of accomplishing the young physician, in all the European languages. In a word, let it be remembered, that I am not pleading against the utility of the dead lan-

guages, but in favour of their *general* utility, against the vulgar notion that they are only necessary to certain professions.

Of all branches of knowledge, the *Law* ought to be the plainest, and most easily understood. Praying in an unknown tongue is not a greater solecism, than the involving in mystery and obscurity those rules which are to govern the conduct of every individual citizen. How can I be expected to conform to laws, with which I am to be unacquainted, or which I cannot understand?.... What indeed are the evils to which the inhabitants of this country are not exposed, on account of the complex and intricate nature of our laws? I must observe (and I do it with no intentional disrespect to the honourable and upright part of the profession) that all who are unfortunate enough to hold their property by any disputable title, or who have rashly exposed themselves in any way to the mischiefs of legal chicanery, are made the prey of one class of citizens; and it is almost proverbial, that of all English commodities, Justice is by far the most expensive. If any part of what I have urged on this topic is consistent with fact, ought a classical education to be considered as a *necessary* qualification for understanding what all ought to understand?

It must be confessed, that with respect to the cultivation of the dead languages, society is at present in a very different state from what it was at the revival of Letters. At that period, all the science, all the history, all the taste which existed, were locked up in the volumes of the Ancients; there was no access to any branch of knowledge but by this path; it was necessary to be introduced into this enlightened school, or to remain in barbarism and ignorance.

In the present state of literature it would be disingenuous to deny, that it is possible for a person not classically educated, to make a proficiency in almost any department of science or literature.

In medicine and philosophy some persons might be named, of no inconsiderable eminence, with but a very slender portion of Greek or Latin. In law and politics

also some instances might be adduced, was not a false pride unfortunately predominant, which might construe into an affront, what is really a compliment. The ladies may be cited with less ceremony on this occasion. In history and philosophy we have a Macaulay; in poetry a Seward and a Williams; in morals a Burney; in dramatic writing a Cowley and an Inchbald, all unacquainted with the languages and compositions of the ancients. It does not, however, follow, from these splendid examples, that the shortest and easiest way to knowledge and excellence, is through the medium of our mother tongue, and that a classical education is of no utility whatever. One lesson indeed we may deduce from what has been advanced on this topic, and that is, to look with a less fastidious eye upon those, who without these advantages (for advantages they certainly are) have made good their progress to eminence and fame.

In estimating the uses of a classical education, it is necessary to confine our views entirely to the *present state* of literature, for indubitably a few centuries ago its advantages were infinitely greater, it was indeed not ornamental, but essential to science. Discarding, therefore, as much as possible, every prejudice of every kind, the real uses of a classical education appear to be nearly as follow.

I. In the first place, grammar, and perhaps orthography, are assisted, by an early acquaintance with the dead languages. I would not be understood to assert, that a person may not be practically versed in both these branches, without any such assistance, but it is a question, whether almost an equal portion of time is not consumed in the attainment of them, through the ordinary medium of English grammars, &c. Besides this, I am apprehensive that a complete, an enlarged, a scientific acquaintance with the principles of grammar, is hardly to be obtained, without the knowledge of some other language than our own. The grammar of the Latin language is more regular than that of any other, and it is therefore admirably calculated to initiate young persons in that necessary science.

II. A similar advantage, which flows from a classical education, is a general knowledge of the structure of language. The Greek, so copious, so curiously compounded, so admirably adapted to supply every want of the mind with respect to expression, affords the happiest instance of art and human invention in the construction of language; it is impossible to study it without perceiving our ideas enlarged and improved on this curious subject. Such an acquaintance with the ancient forms of language, enables us to improve our own, to extend and diversify our modes of expression, to add new and proper words, if necessary; and gives us confidence in occasionally introducing new expressions, and deviating from the common and colloquial forms.

III. A third use, which is not less obvious, results from an accurate acquaintance with the etymology of words. To the phrases of common life, custom has sufficiently familiarized us, and these indeed are most of them derived from our northern ancestors. But the language of science, the language of books indeed, in general, is of classical origin; and it is impossible to know the full force, the correct application of words, without, in some degree, being acquainted with their source.

Every man who has composed for the public, must be sensible of this observation; and allowing every thing to genius and industry, still it cannot be denied that accuracy in writing, at least, is almost exclusively the characteristic of those who can boast some acquaintance with the languages of antiquity.

IV. It is some commendation of almost any pursuit, to say, that it affords us an elegant and an innocent amusement. That it engages occasionally the mind, which, perhaps, would otherwise be the prey of spleen; that it fills up agreeably those hours which, if left vacant, might perhaps be contaminated with vice:

" . . . . . Ni
" Posces anté diem librum cum lumine; si non

" Intendes animum studiis et Rebus honestis,
" Invidia vel amore vigil torquebere."
Hor. Lib. I. Ep. 2.

" Unless you light your early lamp to find
" A moral book; unless you form your mind
" To nobler studies you shall forfeit rest,
" And love or envy shall distract your breast."
Francis.

It is true there are a number of excellent authors in our own language, but still the perusal of the classics, in their original dress, varies and extends this species of entertainment.

V. It is pleasant to observe the manner of an original author, and instructive to remark the peculiar style in which men of exalted genius have, at such distant periods, expressed themselves. I may add, that from the perusal of an original author, we seem to form a more perfect picture of the manners and characters of the age which he describes, than can be acquired from a translation *l*.

VI. Whoever expects to find in the ancients the perfection of science, will be disappointed; but this will not warrant us in a total rejection of all the assistance which may be derived from this source. Of natural knowledge, in particular, there is certainly but little to be collected from their writings. Aristotle, in his history of animals, is a laborious and tolerably correct reporter of facts; but how small a branch of natural science is this, and how much better detailed by modern writers? Pliny, except where he has copied Aristotle, is a wretched fabulist, and no reasoner at all.

The metaphysics of Plato are subtile, visionary, and, useless; those of Aristotle are mere scholastic definitions. In the republic of the latter, as well as in some of the writings of Xenophon and Cicero, are some good political observations; but the experience of the moderns has enabled them greatly to improve this important science.

But if the ancients were deficient on these topics, they were not so in what may be considered as the basis of useful knowledge, in morals, and an acquaintance with the human heart. Though I confess I do not find much of ethical science in Plato, which is deserving of attention; yet in the Απολλωγια of Socrates, and some other of the dialogues, there occur some beautiful reflections. The morals of Aristotle are a dull common-place book, chiefly consisting, like the rest of his philosophy, in definitions. In the writings of the stoics, however, some admirable precepts are to be found; indeed we may go further, we may venture to say there is something of principle in the doctrines of these philosophers; they mould ethics into a kind of science, and distinguish with accuracy the different stages of human perfection.

> Απαιδευτου εργον, το αλλοις εγκαλειν, εφ' οις
> αυτος πρασσει κακως. ηρχμενου παιδευεσθαι,
> το ἑαυτῳ. πεπαιδευμενου, το μητ' αλλῳ,
> μηθ' ἑαυτῳ. *Epict. Enchirid.* c. 10.

"It is the act of an uneducated and ignorant person to blame others for the evils he has brought on himself; of one beginning to be wise to blame himself; of the really wise to blame neither the one nor the other."

> Ιδιοτου στασις και χαρακτηρ ουδεποτε εξ ἑαυτου προσδοκαν ωφελειαν η βλαβην, αλλ' απο των εξω. φιλοσοφου στασις και χαρακτηρ· πασαν ωφελειαν και βλαβην, εξ ἑαυτου προσδοκαν. *Ib.* c. 71.

"It is the state and character of a vulgar mind, never to look for profit or injury from himself, but from some external cause. It is the character of a philosopher to look on himself for whatever may be profitable or injurious."

Without the rage for definition so obvious in Aristotle, their distinctions were happier, more accurate and more agreeably to nature.

Ουτοι δε οἱ λογοι ασυνακτοι. εγω σε πλουσιωτερος ειμι, εγω σε αρα κρεισσων. εγω σε λογιωτερος, εγω σε αρα κρεισσων. εκεινοι δε μαλλον συνακτοι· εγω σε πλουσιωτερος ειμι, ἡ εμη αρα κτησις της σης κρεισσων. εγω λογιωτερος, ἡ εμη αρα λεξις της σης κρεισσων. συ δε γε ουτε κτησις ει, ουτε λεξις.

Epict. Enchir. c. 66.

These expressions are not just...." I am richer than thou, therefore I am better. I am more eloquent, and therefore better." It would be more correct to say I am richer than thou, therefore my property is better. I am more eloquent, therefore my language is better. For thou thyself art neither money nor language.

I shall select a few specimens from another of the same school, and characterised by the same peculiarity of expression.

θανατος δε γε και ζωη, δοξα και ἀδοξια πονος και ἡδονη, πλουτος και πενια, παντα ἐπισης συμβαινη ἀνθρωπων τοις τε ἀγαθοις και τοις κακοις ουτε καλα ὀντα ουτε αἰσχρα *Anton.* lib. ii. c. 11.

" Death and life, honour and dishonour, pain and pleasure, riches and poverty, these alike happen to the good and the bad, and the reason is, that they are in themselves neither good nor dishonourable."

Τε ἀνθρωπινου βιου ὁ μεν χρονος, στιγμη· ἡ δε ουσια, ῥευσα· ἡ δε αἰσθησις ἀμυδρα. ἡ δε ὁλη του σωματος συγκρισις, ευσηπτος· ἡ δε ψυχη ῥομβος ἡ δε τυχη δυστεκμαρτον· ἡ δε φημη ακριτον Συνελοντι δε ἐιπειν παντα τα μεν του σωματος ποταμος· τα δε της ψυχης, ὀνειρος και τυφος. ὁ δε βιος πολεμος και ξενου ἐπιδημια· ἡ ὑστεροφημια δε ληθη. τι ουν το παραπεμψαι δυναμενον; ἐν και μονον φιλοσοφια. τουτο δε, ἐν τῳ τηρειν τον ἐνδον δαιμονα ἀνυβριστον και ἀσινη, ἡδονων και πονων κρεισσονα μηδεν ἐικη ποιουντα μηδε διεψευσμενος και μεθ' ὑποκρισεως ἀνενδεη του ἀλλον ποιησαι τι, ἡ μη ποιησαι.

Anton. lib. ii. c. 17.

" The extent of human life is but a point; existence is constantly flowing away; perception dark and obscure; the body delicate and allied to corruption; the soul a vapour; fortune difficult to foretel; fame injudiciously distributed. In a word, what belongs to the body flows away like a river; what belongs to the soul

is a dream or a bubble. Life is a warfare or a pilgrimage; and posthumous fame is, with respect to ourselves, oblivion. What then is permanent and satisfactory? Philosophy alone; and this consists in keeping the soul free from injury and disgrace, superior to pleasure and pain, without dissembling, falsehood or hypocrisy, and as to happiness independent of the motions of another."

οὐδαμου γαρ οὔτε ἡσυχιωτερον, οὔτε ἀπραγμονεστερον ἀνθρωπος ἀναχωρει ἡ εἰς την ἑαυτου ψυχην· μαλιστ' ὁστις ἐχει ἐνδον τοιαυτα εἰς ἁ ἐγκυψας ἐν πασῃ εὐμαρεια ευθυς γινεται. *Anton.* lib. iv. c. 3.

"A man cannot retire into any place more quiet, or less disturbed, than into the recesses of his own soul, especially if he has treasured up such things there as he can contemplate with satisfaction."

Nor is there wanting a higher philosophy for a basis to these reflections: speaking of death....

Το δε ἐξ ανθρωπων ἀπελθειν ἐι μεν θεοι ἐισιν οὐδεν δεινον· κακω γαρ σε οὐκ ἀν περι βαλοιεν· ἡ δε ἐι τι οὐκ ἐισιν ἡ οὐ μελει αὐτοις των ανθρωπειων, τι μοι ζην ἐν κοσμῳ κενῳ θεων ἡ προνοιας κενῳ; ἀλλα και ἐισι και μελει αὐτοις των ἀνθρωπειων. *Ib.* lib ii. c. 11.

"To depart from earthly things is no calamity. If there are gods they will suffer no evil to befal thee; if there are none, or if they totally disregard human affairs, what advantage is it to live in a world without gods, or without a Providence. But that there are superior beings, and that they regard human events, is beyond dispute."

Τα των θεων προνοιας μεστα τα της τυχης οὐκ ἀνευ φυσεως ἡ συγκλωσεως και ἐπιπλοκης των προνοια διοικουμενων.

Anton. lib. iii. c. 3.

"All is full of the Divine Providence. What is called fortune or chance is not without nature at the bot-

tom, and that connection and chain of causes which is ordered by Providence."

It must, however, be confessed of the Stoic morality, that much of it is extravagant, and some of it trifling; that it is founded upon too few principles, abounds with repetition, and, perhaps, justly incurs the censure of (I think) Lactantius; that it was calculated for actors on the theatre, and not for men in the world.

The most regular and methodical tract upon ethics, which is contained in the whole scope of classical literature, is the offices of Tully; this valuable fragment contains much excellent reasoning, and much sound observation; but, still it appears to me but a fragment. Whether the lively and desultory genius of Cicero revolted against the toil of a laboured, methodical, scientific production, or whether he was interrupted in the progress of his task, the work is certainly imperfect; there are several useful topics entirely omitted, and even the system itself is left in an unfinished state.

In the other beautiful rhapsodies of Tully, in vain shall we look for any thing like system or method. No man, however, can read his Cato Major, his De Amicitia, his Tusculan Disputations, without moral improvement; his Letters, and all his writings, abound in animating and interesting reflections, in excellent maxims. There is a point, a force, a climax, too, in his observations, which cannot be too greatly admired, and carries the mind along with it, and which gives a novelty even to what is common-place in itself:

"Et nomen pacis dulce est, et ipsa res salutaris; sed inter pacem et servitutem plurimum interest: Pax est tranquilla libertas, servitus postremum malorum omnium, non modò bello, sed morte etiam repellendum."....Cic. in M. Ant.

"The very name of peace is delightful, and the possession most salutary; but there is a wide difference between peace and slavery. Peace is the tranquil enjoyment of liberty; slavery is the extreme of evils, not only to be repelled by war, but even by death."

"Sin aliquando necessitas nos ad ea detruserit, quæ nostri ingenii non erunt: omnis adhibenda erit cura, meditatio, diligentia, ut ea si non decorè at quam minimum indecore facere possimus."....*Cic.* de Off.

"If sometimes necessity should compel us to what is contrary to our minds, we must exert our utmost care, attention and diligence, that if we cannot do them decorously, we shall at all events do them as little indecorously as possible."

In the writings of the poets, the most useful and beautiful reflections are expressed with a simplicity which delights, or a force which penetrates the heart; the former is chiefly the characteristic of the Greek, the latter of the Roman muse.

If HISTORY is classed among the sciences, in this the ancients cannot be too warmly commended. To their admirable writings we are indebted, not only for the most important facts in the history of mankind, but for the most perfect models in that species of composition. The ancients have indeed scarcely been equalled in this line, and I think I can venture to say, that I have not seen the sweet simplicity of Herodotus....the dignity of Thucydides, the harmony and elegance of Sallust, or the pointed and forcible expression of Tacitus, transferred into any modern language, by their most learned translators.

VII. But whatever was wanting to the ancients in science, is amply compensated in taste. Homer and Virgil are still unrivalled, and the latter of them is certainly still untranslated. The pastorals of Theocritus, and perhaps the odes of Pindar, have nothing exactly resembling them in modern languages. The satires of Horace and Juvenal have only been imitated. In every department of prose composition also, we find among the ancients excellent models. Without deprecating the merit of our contemporaries, we may truly say that the clear and energetic reasoning of Demosthenes, the full, harmonious, and ornamental periods of Cicero, and the sententious neatness of Sallust,

have not been excelled. To form, therefore, a correct taste, one effectual mode, at least, is by a well directed study of these estimable compositions, and by occasionally comparing them with the excellencies and defects of modern productions.

If in any department of polite literature, which they have cultivated, the ancients have particularly failed, it is in the drama; but of this I have said sufficient in the preceding letters.

There are some other branches of literature, in which I think the moderns have excelled, and some which have not at all been cultivated by the ancients; but this does not, in any view, militate against the utility of classical literature, since an accomplished person ought to be acquainted with the most perfect productions, both of ancient and modern times.

From a fair consideration of the real uses of classical literature, some practical conclusions result, which appear of no inconsiderable importance in the education of youth.

Impressed as I am with a full sense of the advantages resulting from a classical education, I cannot help thinking, that an unreasonable and enthusiastic regard has sometimes been paid to the writings of the ancients. Instead of considering them as useful assistants, as guides to knowledge, they have been extolled, as containing within themselves all that is worthy of being known, and men have mistaken the rudiments of science, for science itself. How many have devoted their lives to the study of the classics, as if there were no other duties to be performed, no other advantages to be obtained, no other laurels to be reaped? How many have continued, during their existence, in the elements of science, without extending their views to any thing beyond them, without indeed making use of their own understanding.

I should wish to see the ancients studied for their matter, as well as for their language; but the information which they convey, is too commonly made a secondary consideration. The attention of youth is di-

reeted to the elegant latinity of Cæsar and of Horace, not to the facts, observations, or precepts, which are contained in these valuable authors. If the tutors of our youth condescend to remark even upon the beauties of the classics, it is not on the beauty of sentiment, it is not on the vigour of imagination, it is not on the poetical ornaments. Their attention is at the utmost extended to a choice of words, to a curious grammatical connexion, or to the nice intricacies of idiomatical phraseology.

At the revival of letters a race of commentators were useful, if not necessary; they were the pioneers of literature, who cleared the way for more respectable adventurers. But in the present state of literature, can we behold without regret a man of genius dedicating a life to a few barren and fruitless verbal criticisms, to the regulating of a few phrases, or correcting in a few instances the quantity and metre of an obscure author; when, had he applied his talents as they ought to have been applied, he, perhaps, would have produced an original composition, more valuable than the production on which he has so unworthily bestowed his labour?

To write Latin decently and intelligibly, may occasionally prove a convenience to a literary man; chiefly in facilitating his commerce with foreign literati; but surely the attempt (for it is but an attempt) to compose poetical productions in Greek and Latin, is, at best, only a species of elegant trifling. If life is short, and science of unbounded extent; if our duties are many, and but few our opportunities of qualifying for them, and performing them as we ought, are we justified in neglecting solid and useful branches of knowledge; are we to pursue straws, and leaves, and gossimer, while we leave the grain and fruits, which should be the support of life, to perish and to rot?

The example of some of our enlightened neighbours on the continent, may, perhaps, be worthy of our imitation. They study the ancients, but they study them to read and imitate them. They are not devoted to this study alone; they make themselves masters not only of

the ancient, but of the modern languages; they can converse with the well-informed of other nations, and they can read their works. Thus an infinite extent of knowledge is opened to their view; and they are less likely to be the slaves of prejudice than the cloistered pedant, who expects to find the whole of knowledge in the blind reveries of ancient scholiasts; whose philosophy is locked up in Plato, whose morals and politics are only derived from Aristotle, and who regards the tales of Pliny as the perfection of natural science.

It is by estimating truly the advantages of classical learning, and not by over-rating its importance, that we can give it respect, or promote its cultivation.

I think an acquaintance with the ancient languages, essential to the formation of an accomplished character; but if a man would be accomplished he must not stop there; he must not expect to find in the ancients what they do not contain; or "see in Homer more than Homer knew."

In a word, without neglecting the ancients, we may derive much wisdom, much taste, and much pleasure from the productions of modern writers; the study of both is compatible, if we study both as we ought.

THE END.

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